Indissoluble

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/37519624.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Rape/Non-Con
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Jack Crawford, Beverly Katz, Jimmy Price, Brian Zeller
Additional Tags:	noncon not between hannibal and will, Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Non-Traditional Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Alpha Hannibal Lecter, Beta Will Graham, Mating Bites, Mating Bond, consensually abusive relationship, dubcon, Kidnapping, Confinement, Courtroom Drama, very stupid fake biology, Will Graham Has Encephalitis, Illnesses, nonconsensual disclosure of trauma, Masturbation, Sex Toys, Cock sleeve, Dildos, Sadism, Masochism, Blood, a lot of blood, Restraints, Rimming, Anal Sex, Asphyxiation, Choking, Knotting, autassassinophilia, Strangulation, Hand Jobs, Praise Kink, wound care, Oral Knotting, Face-Fucking, Vomiting, Hallucinations, Weaponized Praise Kink, Rope Bondage, Shibari, Blood Kink, Cutting, erotic exsanguination, references to cannibalism, Brief suicidal ideation, Torture Fantasies, Degloving, Skinning, teeth pulling, teeth swallowing, Dark Will Graham, Will Finds Out, Aromantic Will Graham, shared sensation
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Disintegration
Collections:	i'll love the littler things, Cannibals In Love
Stats:	Published: 2022-03-04 Completed: 2022-03-11 Words: 66,209 Chapters: 4/4

Indissoluble

by Foul-Mouthed Harlot (Winddrag0n)

Summary

Will still uses the shower in what was essentially his room. The lock on the door has not been used since rut- Hannibal had installed it, after all, and was more than capable of simply dismantling it. When Will is in here, Hannibal tends to leave him alone, only entering once Will has finished bathing to assist with bandaging his neck. As he enters he throws his jacket on the bare mattress. Soon after, the rest of his clothes join it in a haphazard mess. The bandage, at least, he drops into the trash can.

Before stepping into the shower he stops before the mirror. His body is mottled with bruises but none draw his attention quite like the ones around his neck. In places he can see the imprint of fingers but in others, it’s blending with the wide marks from when Hannibal choked him with an arm instead of his hands. Gingerly, he presses a finger into the darkest area, hissing with pain when it connects.

Will smiles, backs away, and steps into the shower.

~~~

Will steps willingly into the spider's web.

Notes

This wasn't supposed to happen.

I want to get the major warnings out of the way first. The noncon in this is portrayed as an intensely traumatic experience. It is not between Hannibal and Will and it is not explicitly described, it's more of a fade to black but not quite. The tags will apply to the entire fic, which is fully written, and chapters will go up roughly every 2-3 days. When the torture fantasies happen, they are brief- no more than a paragraph each- but graphic. And this should go without saying, but in real life, a 'consensually abusive relationship' is... not possible. That term is inherently an oxymoron. It's just... the simplest way to describe their relationship here. PLEASE make sure you are reading the tags before going into this.

I never meant for it to get this long. The first part of this series is important to this one, so this one won't make any sense if you start here for whatever reason. I'm screwing with omegaverse biology again so if you're a stickler for the rules of that, you might not enjoy reading this. If you're just here for the porn, first of all, sorry? And second of all, it's almost
~~~

entirely in the first half of the fic. The back half is 95% plot and 5% a sex scene without any sexual contact. Again, I'm not really sure how this played out the way that it did.

Will being aromantic isn't a major plot device or anything, he just kind of... turned out that way. Eventually I decided to actively write him as such. Which was fun, because I'm personally aromantic, but it made certain scenes... a bit of a struggle to work around. Still, he's aromantic through and through here.

Finally, since I never actually planned to write a sequel, there may be minor inconsistencies between Precipitate and this one. Nothing major. If I'm lucky, none at all!

Chapter 1

Will manages to hide at Hannibal's house for a week before Jack stops believing his excuses.

Being Jack, a person who knows Will well enough to know he'd never be honest otherwise, he ambushes Will. It had seemed strange that Hannibal would knock on the front door of his own home but Will had just assumed he was warning Will of his presence and had suddenly developed empathy overnight. After a full week of blatantly possessive and controlling behavior from the Alpha.

Honestly, it had been a reach.

Jack's expression sours the moment he sees Will. The lighter injuries have already healed and Hannibal had taken it upon himself to wrap bandages around the entirety of Will's neck, hiding the angry bruises as well as the bite mark. The sling cannot in any way be hidden. "Come with me," he growls, reaching for Will's wrist to drag him away. Will jerks his good arm away from the gesture.

"Wait, hold on. Might want to reconsider touching me." Jack's expression darkens so Will turns, pushing away the ends of his curls where they hide part of the bandage, unmistakably thicker where the 'mating bite' lies underneath.

For a while, Jack is silent. "We need to talk, Graham. *Now.* "

It feels a whole lot like an angry father using his full name when he's gotten into trouble, and Will fights back the urge to laugh. "Um. Okay. Obviously you shouldn't come inside. Do you know where Hannibal is right now? Abandon him at Quantico?"

"He is helping with a case," Jack confirms.

"Right. I need to. Let him know." The best case scenario would have been fending Jack off until his shoulder was healed enough to forgo the sling, but he hadn't expected to be that fortunate and had had plenty of time to figure out how to spin the story to save both their hides. Not that he'd actually come up with something believable in the meantime. Winston, always curious, is trying to nose past him and greet their guest. "Back, boy. Stay inside."

Will had sort of assumed Hannibal would let him return home once the worst had passed, up until he came back to the house one day with Will's pack in tow. That was when it really hit him that he *may* be in a little bit over his head. "Will, this is-"

"Just." Will holds up the hand he can, brow furrowing. "I know this doesn't look great but I really need you to listen to what I have to say before you make any snap judgements, alright?"

"Fine. Leave him a note."

Leaving a note would probably end in Hannibal tracking them down and physically dragging him back to this house, so he pulls out his phone instead and calls the man. He picks up immediately. “Will,” he answers, voice warm and affectionate. It’s weird how real it sounds.

On some level, Hannibal probably loves him. Maybe he *does* feel something as simple and normal as affection towards Will. It just so happens that those emotions are valued far less than the… less socially acceptable ones, to put it mildly. “Hi. You know where Jack is right now?”

“He stepped out to-” The sentence ends abruptly as Hannibal makes the connection and the words taper off into, of all things, the beginning of a low growl.

“I’m going to go talk to Jack. *Somewhere else.* When we finish I will come back here. Got it?” Jack doesn’t look entirely like he’s planning on bringing Will back after the conversation ends. “Probably won’t take long, I’m sure I’ll be back before you are. I’m taking the dogs with me, alright? *We’ll be back.* ” He hangs up before Hannibal can respond, turning back to Jack. “There’s a park nearby I take the dogs to. Walking distance.” He opens the door wider and whistles, rousing the dogs in no time. Jack is nearly knocked over as they surge out of the door. Will locks it behind them with the key he stole after Hannibal refused to give him one. “Let’s go.”

His boss, as always, is frowning. “You don’t think he’ll come back so quickly?”

“Oh, I’m positive he will,” he laughs. “Don’t worry, he won’t slash your tires or anything. Too inelegant for him. Time to go.”

The sheer amount of dogs makes conversation en route to the park all but impossible, so they walk in silence until they reach a bench where the dogs have plenty of room to frolic within sight. It’s a cool day, more than cool enough to justify the long sleeves Will has, a blessing since he’s not sure he’ll be able to convince Jack if the man sees what his body still looks like underneath them. “Just say it,” Will sighs, leaning back against the bench. “We both know what you’re thinking so just say it.”

“The injuries, the extent to which you seem to be afraid of him, the *bite*- it’s textbook abusive behavior, Will.”

“I’m not afraid of him,” Will shoots back. “I knew he’d be violent, and he really didn’t injure me. The shoulder was an accident.” When he turns to Jack, it’s obvious the man doesn’t believe it. “I promise, Jack. He’s rough but he didn’t intentionally hurt me.”

“You better have a hell of a good explanation for it.”

“It.” Will pauses. “Do me a favor and don’t comment on the. Details of this. I fell off the bed.”

“You expect me to believe that?”

“He *fucked* me off the bed,” Will clarifies. Jack, mercifully, doesn’t respond. “I fell badly, onto my shoulder. And you know what happened? He fixed it. In the middle of rut, in the

middle of sex. Popped it back into place, got the sling, that was it for the day. Do you really think he would have done that if he wanted to hurt me?"

"And what happened after?"

"Um." Will looks down. "Well, it didn't magically make the rut end, either. But he was gentle. If it hurt me he'd stop and find. Something that didn't. Best I could have expected given the circumstances."

"Then why is he so possessive?"

"Protective," Will corrects. "Do you know anything about his past?"

Jack shakes his head. "You think something traumatic happened to him to trigger a strong protective instinct?"

"Has to have. And then there's. You know." Will gestures vaguely towards his neck.

It makes Jack stiffen, and he's looking straight ahead when he finally speaks. "You're not going to like this question but you know I have to ask it."

"Oh, here we go," Will mutters.

"Did he force the mating bite on you, Will?"

"It's not-" Will's mouth flies shut as he sees the look in Jack's eye. Technicalities don't matter. If he had been an Omega or even another Alpha, it would have been. You also can't force a *proper* mating bite on someone who's rejecting it, but you can still leave a bite there that makes your intentions obvious. "No. I- I asked him to."

It's Jack's turn to sigh and he rubs at his temples. "Will-"

"It won't sound good if you ask me why."

"Why."

"Will it fly if I say I got caught up in the moment?" Instead of words, that earns him a dark look. "I don't know," Will admits. "It felt. Right."

Jack sags against the bench. "If you were planning on mating with him I would have appreciated being warned ahead of time."

"Not mated," Will protests. "I don't. Know what this is. We can't be bonded, obviously, and logically he knows that we aren't automatically connected like that just because I let him bite me. Instinctually is a different matter altogether." A great deal of what Hannibal has been doing cannot be explained away as instincts, but he trusts the man to behave around others.

"The Alpha part of his brain knows he gave a mating bite to his partner while in rut," Jack elaborates. "Is he treating you like an Omega?"

“I don’t think intentionally. He does keep putting blankets on my bed- think he’s expecting me to build a nest. But to his instincts, I’m an injured mate that he needs to protect. Once my shoulder heals he’ll take me back home.” He’ll have to, now. Hannibal won’t be happy about that.

“I don’t like this,” Jack says honestly. “It still doesn’t feel right but I’m choosing to trust you. Figure whatever this is out before it turns into something I need to intervene in.”

“It won’t.” Will wants to hope that, while Hannibal would react poorly if he left altogether, the man will be more or less content with being away from him once he has healed. The impression he gets is that Hannibal cares less about establishing a concrete bond with Will than he does about ensuring Will never does so with anyone else. For the time being.

The way Hannibal will start growling when he approaches the front door isn’t helping him convince himself of this.

It’s a while before Jack speaks again. “This isn’t something you can pretend didn’t happen.”

“I know,” Will answers softly. “I won’t. We can’t go back to the way we were before, now. I don’t think I even want to.”

And that, at least, is not a lie.

He sees Jack back to his car (with four working tires, thankfully, for despite what he had said Hannibal has a viciously petty streak) and waits until he’s gone before making his way up the steps to the front door of the house, dogs in tow.

The front door is locked. Hannibal is home, his car in the driveway is more than proof of such, and Will sighs. He unlocks it with the stolen key and pushes the door open, gesturing inwards for his pack who pile in obediently. His arrival can be nothing short of obvious yet Hannibal does not greet him at the door.

From the kitchen, the sounds of cooking answer the ghost of a question. Once the dogs have filed into the large living room they seem to have taken over Will resigns himself to his fate and enters Hannibal’s domain.

The Alpha pauses for no more than half a second when Will enters. “Ah, Will. Leave it on the island, if you would.”

Playing dumb couldn’t possibly make the situation worse so he does so. “Leave what?”

That makes Hannibal’s grip on the pan tighten and when he places it back onto the burner there is an audible clang. “Now, Will.”

Rolling his eyes would not be an advisable response, particularly when Hannibal is already irritated. Will slips the key out of his jacket pocket and sets it on the granite. He has multiple

copies, anyways.

Hannibal seems satisfied that whatever he is cooking can be left unattended for a moment, turning to face Will, walking towards him with a calm so manufactured that it sends a shiver down the Beta's spine. One hand on his upper arm is all Hannibal needs to spin him around and press him chest-first into the island. It's higher than most, made for standing and not sitting, digging into his ribs and just barely passing under his sling. Hannibal doesn't need to hold him in place- Will knows better than to fight it.

The Alpha leans in, scenting Will, who turns away both to bare his neck and to avoid looking at the other man. He can feel the man's hot breath even through his bandages.

It's over as quickly as it began, Hannibal pulling away and returning to his cooking. "Shower, please," he orders, voice sharp. "Your smell is unbearable."

He had been successful in his efforts to keep Jack as far away as possible, it seems. Hannibal's hyper-sensitive nose meant that if another Alpha so much as *touched* Will he would be able to know. The fact that he's being allowed to address the issue alone is proof enough that Hannibal had smelled nothing he did not expect.

Will still uses the shower in what was essentially his room. The lock on the door has not been used since rut- Hannibal had installed it, after all, and was more than capable of simply dismantling it. When Will is in here, Hannibal tends to leave him alone, only entering once Will has finished bathing to assist with bandaging his neck. As he enters he throws his jacket on the bare mattress. Soon after, the rest of his clothes join it in a haphazard mess. The bandage, at least, he drops into the trash can.

Before stepping into the shower he stops before the mirror. His body is mottled with bruises but none draw his attention quite like the ones around his neck. In places he can see the imprint of fingers but in others, it's blending with the wide marks from when Hannibal choked him with an arm instead of his hands. Gingerly, he presses a finger into the darkest area, hissing with pain when it connects.

Will smiles, backs away, and steps into the shower.

All the products in here are unscented, of course. He washes himself quickly and is careful not to get too much soap and shampoo into the wound on his neck. Hannibal would be unhappy if it left an ugly scar, after all. When he emerges he makes his way to the dresser, finding a nice pair of dark slacks and white button up shirt to wear with it. He has his underwear and pants pulled on when Hannibal arrives.

Will had already been sitting near to the edge of the mattress so Hannibal simply sits beside him, setting the badgages and creams between them both. Without needing to be asked Will turns away from Hannibal, tipping his head forward and holding what little of his curls hang over the wound out of the way.

"It's healing nicely," Hannibal comments, examining the bite mark. "No need for the antibiotic cream anymore, I should think."

“And the toasted sesame oil?” Will mutters. Hannibal chooses to ignore the smart comment, applying said oil before tightly bandaging the area. When he wraps the bandages around Will’s neck, it’s pulled more tightly than it reasonably should be. If Will tries to take a deep breath of air he can’t quite make it to the end. He can’t quite stop himself from trying, just to feel how constricting it is. He can’t see his face but he knows Hannibal is smiling.

“Dinner will be ready shortly,” Hannibal informs him, gathering up the supplies and excusing himself from the bedroom.

That means Will has a brief period where he can remain up here and really rack his brain on how and when to best tell Hannibal that he’s going to need to let Will go soon.

He could tell him during sex, when he’s distracted. That is almost immediately struck from the record as incredibly dangerous. Right before Hannibal leaves for work will just result in him not going to work, and that extends to right before Hannibal leaves for anything, really. Dinner probably *is* the safest option and that means he has to do this soon.

This is all kind of his own fault, anyways, so he’s really just reaping what he’s sown. Hannibal had attempted to go back to how he’d been before, right out of his rut. He had clearly assumed the best approach was once more playing the supportive, kind partner, horrified at his own behavior, until he tricked Will into going along with it again. Presumably the plan was to chip away at Will’s common sense and self-preservation instincts until there was too little left and he was incapable of leaving before he’d fallen in too deep.

Will, unfortunately, had apparently lost both of those things long ago. In an absolutely spectacular display of poor judgment Will had slept with Hannibal again less than twenty-four hours after the Alpha had come out of rut, during which he placed Hannibal’s hands around his neck himself. The farce had gotten dropped pretty damn quickly after that. What’s the use of playing pretend to lure in prey that’s already walked in willingly to the web of their own volition?

If Jack ever catches wise, Will thinks there’s a very real chance he’ll end up in WITSEC.

He’s lingered here long enough, and he trudges down the stairs, trying not to think about what Hannibal might be capable of doing when he’s angry. He had been honest when he told Jack he wasn’t afraid of Hannibal. No matter what he does, there’s no way the Alpha will kill him at this point. He’s invested far too much into this and someone like Hannibal would never give a mating bite to someone he considered disposable. What he’s worried about is what Hannibal may be capable of doing to *other people.*

Dinner is being laid out on the table, so Will managed to time this correctly. Hannibal’s words are clipped as he introduces the dishes and he’s making no effort to hide his obvious displeasure at the situation. Hannibal, too, knows things as they currently are are coming to an end.

“What did you speak to Jack about?” Hannibal asks, barely several minutes into the meal.

He’s *pissed.* Mad enough that Will needs to push back or he’s going to suffer the brunt of it later. “About how you’ve gotten me locked up in here like a dragon guarding a princess,

mostly."

"You're injured. You must be kept safe."

It's remarkably difficult to tell if this is an excuse or if there's just that much cognitive dissonance going on in that pretty little head of his. Maybe it's entirely intentional, a loop he controls all aspects of to keep Will bound to him. "Funnily enough, most people would disagree with your methods here. Particularly since *you're* the one hurting me in the first place."

"You enjoy it."

"Yeah, well, I never said I was one of them. The fact of the matter is that we can't keep on existing like this, in our own little bubble. We need to return to reality at some point."

Hannibal hands tighten around his silverware, and he takes a bite, chewing slowly and making Will wait for his response. "We could simply leave."

"No," Will immediately replies, pointing at Hannibal with his fork. He knows how much the man hates it when he does that. "Absolutely not. I like it here, and I care about my job. Packing up and leaving is not an option. That's also how you get the FBI on your ass for suspicion of kidnapping."

"Jack has suspicions."

"Hannibal, you *know* how this looks on the surface. You dislocated my shoulder. That's a serious injury."

"Not intentionally."

"Oh, sorry," Will laughs. "Yeah, my bad. You wrenched my arm behind my back so hard that it dislocated it. Much better."

"Will." There is an obviously warning tone in his voice.

"I told him you fucked me off the bed, by the way. And then made a big deal about how gentle you were with me after that. Just so you know the lie we're going with."

"How quaint." There's a real heat to his words, now, buried beneath. "Are you going to tell him you fell down the stairs next?"

"Hannibal." Will stabs his fork into his dinner, leaving it standing upright. It's not only Hannibal that is rapidly losing his patience. "I'm sorry he *ambushed me* before I came up with a better excuse. Maybe you don't realize it, but this is pretty god damn hard to justify to other people."

"I am well aware of how contrary to socially acceptable norms our relationship runs." It's icy, now, such a sharp drop in temperature that Will barely bites back a shiver.

“What the hell did you want me to tell him? ‘Hannibal did, in fact, pull my arm out of its socket on purpose and without warning, but it’s fine, actually, because I liked it?’ You *know* how that would end.”

Hannibal clenches his jaw, ignoring Will’s comment. “How, pray tell, did you explain away your continued absence from work beyond what had been given?”

Will closes his eyes and steels himself. When he opens them again, Hannibal has very obviously caught on and looks, quite frankly, terrifying. “Catering to your ‘protective instincts’. Told him you wouldn’t let me out of your sight until my arm had healed. So the same lie you tried to tell me, really. Now we’re both on the same page with that one.”

Hannibal clenches his fist so hard the fork *bends,* and Will can’t stop the way he jumps in his seat. “ *No,”* Hannibal growls, a strange booming echo to his voice, his eyes flashing. “I will not allow you to leave.”

The silence after hangs in the air as Will’s eyes widen. “Hannibal, wait. Was that… was that your Voice?”

There is a moment of hesitation before the reply, the only thing giving away Hannibal’s uncertainty. “I suppose it was.”

“Wait.” Will frowns. “But you…” Alphas and Omegas only get the full usage of their Voice after a successful mating, so there’s no way that came from *him.* “Have you been mated before?” He’d never seen a mating bite on Hannibal but there were surgeries to correct something like that after a mate has passed. They’re illegal, but that doesn’t seem like something that would have stopped Hannibal.

“I have not.” It’s said with some measure of disgust.

“Okay, but. Where else could that have come from?”

“You may get me tested, if you wish.” Mating changes the body on a biological level and it is possible to tell if someone has been or is currently mated with the right sort of testing.

“No.” Will doesn’t care if Hannibal is lying about it, but there’s also a tiny part of him that’s afraid of running tests and finding out something unexpected. He’s a Beta, that much is known for certain. But it’s surprisingly easy to accept that *Hannibal* has something weird going on, or that his desire for Will was so powerful it managed to alter the commonly accepted rules of biology. “I don’t really give a shit, and it’s not like that compelled me to do anything. So might want to keep that little detail under wraps for the time being.”

He thinks he catches Hannibal murmuring something about that being a shame. At least it pulled attention away from the fact that Hannibal can’t keep him tucked away in his rut house like a mistress for much longer.

Unfortunately, Will still can’t quite manage to keep his god damn mouth shut because while he doesn’t have much interest in how this situation affects him personally it is undeniably

fascinating, assuming Hannibal is telling the truth. “Actually, what the hell would happen if I bit you back, in this case?”

Hannibal’s eyes go more red than the normal burgundy and his gaze sharpens, like a predator watching his prey. “It is impossible to say,” he answers, voice thick. “The most likely scenario is nothing at all.”

“But this,” Will points to the bandage on his neck, “ *also* should have been nothing. We’re far beyond the most likely scenario at this point.”

“Alphas and Omegas can bond with Betas, in a way. The biological markers of a mating will be visible in their blood but that is the extent of it.”

“Yeah, no…” He points at Hannibal’s throat. “It. Uh. the Voice technically comes from ingesting the blood of your mate, right?”

A quick nod. The red in his eyes has not faded; if anything, it’s growing. “Mating is very rarely interrupted before the second bite is exchanged but from the few times we have evidence from just that, it can be safely said that that is the case.”

“So we’ve established that this is a unique case and something could, potentially, happen.”

“Will.” His eyes are fully red now. “I must ask you to steer this conversation elsewhere if you are merely speaking hypotheticals.”

Oops. Well, in for a penny. “Eh,” he shrugs. “I asked you to bite me, so I think it’s fair to say that ship has sailed. I don’t really see why I shouldn’t.”

Hannibal stands abruptly, sending his chair screeching back against the floor. Will’s screeches just as loudly moments later once Hannibal walks around to his side of the table, yanking it out and lifting Will out of his chair to toss him over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. “Making my arm worse to lengthen the amount of time you can believably keep me here under the illusion of protection will also get the FBI on your tail,” Will helpfully informs him.

“Duly noted.”

He can’t exactly see where they’re going in his current position, but it’s easy enough to guess. “And we probably should get you tested beforehand, just to be sure.”

Hannibal very slightly falters, like he’d been carrying Will to the bedroom right this second for the aforementioned purpose. He likely had been. Unfortunately, he’ll have to settle for simply fucking Will so hard he has trouble getting up the next morning as usual.

Can Alphas knot outside of their rut if they get riled up enough? Will thinks he might be about to find out.

They can, it turns out.

In retrospect, Will should have been suspicious when Hannibal had flipped them over at the end. Sometimes Hannibal liked seeing Will in charge, holding Hannibal down with one hand and moving how *he* wants it, but most of the time Hannibal is more likely to pin Will to the sheets and fuck into him relentlessly. So when Hannibal abruptly rolled onto his back, pulling Will down over the base of his cock, he'd been so busy being confused he didn't notice the knot swelling until it was too late to do anything about it. Will had glowered down at Hannibal for the approximately thirteen minutes he was locked onto the man's lap and it only seemed to make the man more smug than he usually was, which should have been impossible. At least he could take some petty revenge from the way Hannibal's semen poured out of him and directly back on top of the man it came from once he was able to get free.

Well, on Hannibal and the sheets. They've gone through a lot of sheets.

Once Hannibal had later calmed down and remembered what they had been discussing before his Voice became known he went right back to being angry in record time. Hannibal, Will has found, becomes exceedingly petty when he's angry. He plays the part of a gentle, caring Alpha to a T, never again tying the bandages too tight around Will's neck and going out of his way to do things to help the man instead.

It's both infuriating and frustrating but it's a step in the right direction, since Hannibal wouldn't be acting like this if he hadn't accepted the fact that he had to let Will go soon.

They get Hannibal's blood tested. It seems that Hannibal is well aware of just how trustworthy he isn't, as he lets Will draw the blood himself and package it up and send it away. When the results come back they show that Hannibal has only ever had one mate, an incomplete bond made very recently with a biological male likely to be in their thirties, which means it couldn't possibly be someone other than Will himself.

It opens up a great deal of interesting questions, since in normal circumstances if an Alpha bonded with a Beta it wouldn't show up incomplete like this.

Hannibal warns Will that he will fight the bite Will tries to give him on instinct and for similar reasons, he'll likely try to re-bite Will in response. Because of this (and because Hannibal doesn't want to chance disturbing the scar, apparently) they make the decision to wait until his neck has fully healed, which means his arm heals well enough to return to work first, which means it gets put off for some time since nearly the second Will comes back, he gets swept up into a new case.

It's pretty typical psychotic Alpha behavior. Male Omegas are going missing, turning up dead months later with signs of sexual assault and a failed mating bite on their neck. The killer is careful to clean away all DNA that may have left. The victims are always unmated and fairly beautiful, even for Omegas, and the killer never seems to have more than one at a time.

"He's searching for the perfect mate," Will murmurs, arms crossed and brows furrowed.

"He. Uh. Yeah." Jack clearly had not warned the team about the developments between Will and Hannibal because Beverly, Jimmy and Brian all stare openly at the bandage around

Will's neck. They're all very obviously shocked but they're all behaved enough not to call attention to it directly, at least during work. Beverly continues. "We're assuming male, for the time being. He's clearly got some sort of princess delusion and since you can't force a mating bite, he interprets it as the Omegas rejecting him and throws them away." She scowls. "Pretty disgusting behavior."

"Do the Omegas have anything in common?"

"Other than being unmated?" Brian shakes his head. "We can tell based on the locations they vanish from that the killer is at least somewhat local. They dump the bodies over a wide enough area that we can't pinpoint much but you have to watch the victims for a while to pull off kidnapping them and not getting caught."

"Current victims?"

"Body turned up while you were." Beverly stops herself. "It was the third one, and what finally caught someone's attention and had them start looking at this as a serial killer instead of unrelated incidents, kicking it up to us. Since there's no DNA, we can't be 100% certain, but it's overwhelmingly likely to be one killer."

Hannibal would probably have quite a bit to say about the killer but he's absent at the moment, something that spares Will's dignity for the time being. He still wishes that the psychiatrist was present for his insight alone. "Any idea how long we have until he picks up another one?"

"Hopefully several months," Jack answers. "He starts from scratch every time because he's not expecting it to fail. The problem is that it seems to escalate, since every failure just upsets him further."

He's seen the photos. The bodies become progressively more brutalized. Whatever is happening, they need to catch the killer soon. "So what's the plan?"

Jack inclines his head towards the trio of forensic scientists. "They're still going through all the evidence that was just dropped into our laps, and I'm working on interviewing any persons of interest again. Never can be sure the local cops did their jobs right. Will, you'll be with me."

That's unsurprising. Though he can't say he's fond of it, Will's empathy is an invaluable tool to have when interviewing a suspect and he's almost always roped into doing just that. "Figured. Who do we have lined up for the day?"

Price picks up a clipboard, reading off the paper before handing it over to Jack. "Looks like the second victim's boss, friend of the third victim, person who found the first body, sister of the first victim, then a bunch of acquaintances of the most recent. Fun day!"

"We'll head out whenever you're ready, Will."

"Great." Will knew he'd be thrown right back into work when he came back, but it's still weird to be acting like nothing happened. He suspects once Hannibal is free to join them it

won't be an ignorable factor any longer. "Let's just get it over with." A headache is already starting to form.

Jack shoots Will a chastising look and then they're off, on their way to DC. As usual, Jack drives them. "This was the body dropped closest to us," he tells Will, as the hour long drive begins.

"Second victim, yeah?"

"That's the one." For a brief wonderful moment Will thinks Jack *isn't* going to stray from the case and ask him a thousand questions about Hannibal, but those hopes are quickly dashed. "How's your arm?"

Will rolls it, testing. It's tender but barely noticeable. "Can't do any heavy lifting for quite a while but it's healed enough that I can use it normally."

"Good." An awkward silence hangs in the air between them. "Will, I-"

"Please just say whatever you're trying to dance around. It'll be easier for both of us."

Jack sighs. "I don't know how I feel about all this."

How Jack feels about it doesn't fucking matter, but Will bites that comment back down. He knows, logically, that Jack is concerned for a very good reason, and it's not any sort of judgement on his part. That can't stop him from prickling at the insinuation, though. "Why? You trust Hannibal, right?"

"I did," Jack mutters, and Will stiffens in his seat. *That's* not good. "Probably still do, but I need to see him first." That confirms that Hannibal hasn't been to Quantico since Jack's little ambush stunt.

"What's with the sudden suspicions?" He's trying to probe as carefully as possible, but he knows Jack won't be forthright if he's still concerned he may be a victim.

"Don't get me wrong, Will. I'm not surprised in the slightest that something ended up happening between the two of you." Well that's kind of embarrassing, and cements the fact that Will is apparently the most dense person on the planet, empathy disorder be damned. "But the both of you are very closed-off people, and the speed at which this escalated is highly out of character for you both."

"Is it really, though?"

Jack looks at Will, unimpressed. "It's more out of character for Lecter, which is why I'm more suspicious of him."

"...you're suspicious of us both."

"Of course I am. What would you think if Katz and Price turned up married to each other one day?"

“I’d assume someone needed a green card.”

“So you get where I’m coming from here.”

“That’s different. Marriage is a different story.”

“Will,” Jack sighs. “I know that, as a Beta, you’re somewhat removed from it. But for Alphas and Omegas, a mating bite is *more* serious than marriage, not less.”

He knows. Will turns to look out the window. “I keep telling you it’s fine.”

“I still want to talk to Hannibal.”

“I don’t appreciate the fact that you believe his word over mine, about myself.” It’s a low blow, one that digs up old wounds.

“You know that’s not the case.” Another sigh, and he can hear the leather squeak as Jack’s hands tighten on the steering wheel. “He hurt you badly enough that you missed two weeks of work. That’s not normal.”

“He wanted to go to the police.” Sure, it had been just to keep up appearances, but it was still technically true. “Once he came back to his senses and saw what he did to me. Only reason he didn’t is because I stopped him.”

“Why?”

“Because I don’t want him to go to jail,” Will admits. “He obviously wasn’t in his right mind and expressed extreme remorse. I knew to expect something like this in the first place, though maybe not so severe.”

“You mentioned that before. When you dislocated your arm, he snapped out of it?”

“Kind of.” Will turns his gaze forward, so he can see Jack in his peripheral vision. “It was like I could see his consciousness slipping through and reining back his instincts. I’m pretty sure that’s something he could do in the future, and the only reason he didn’t this time is because he hadn’t been expecting this to happen at all.”

“Hm.” Fingers are tapping on the wheel now. Traffic is moving smoothly and they’re making good time. “I could see that.”

Will trusts Hannibal to play along. “See? It’s not a big deal.”

“I don’t know.” Jack’s instincts are a fearsome thing. “You’ve done… impulsive things in the past.”

It’s kind of a low blow right back, but Will can’t exactly deny it either. So he goes another route. He glances around, making sure there aren’t any cars nearby before responding. “It wasn’t impulsive. I’m probably going to bite him back, actually.”

The car swerves but Jack quickly gets it back under control. “You’re- were you going to tell me this at some point?”

“I’m telling you now,” Will points out. “Besides, it’s my personal life. Why do I have to tell you?”

“Because you both work for me!” Jack growls. “You can’t act like I’m butting in where I don’t belong.”

Jack, unfortunately, has a point. “It wouldn’t change anything about the way we work together. I don’t see how it could.”

“You’ll both have a bias towards each other.”

“Really?” Will turns towards Jack, disbelieving. “You think me and Hannibal are going to have issues with bias. I nearly punched him on the last case because he kept tearing apart anything I suggested.”

“It can be unconscious,” Jack argues.

“Then thank god it’s not just the two of us working. There are, at a minimum, four other people to call us out if it starts happening.”

“I suppose you have a point,” Jack grudgingly admits.

That awkward silence hangs again, until Jack breaks it. "How do you feel about him?"

A shrug probably wouldn't be well received. "I don't really… know how to quantify it. I wouldn't have volunteered to help him through rut while knowing he was in love with me if I felt *nothing.* "

"Do you love him?" It's very very obvious that Jack is uncomfortable with this conversation and doesn't enjoy prying into his subordinate's love life. He's doing it out of concern and nothing more.

Will manages to swallow back down his retort of "I literally just answered that." What he says instead is "I don't even really know what that feels like, so I can't answer honestly."

Jack is silent for a moment. "Then why do you want to return the bite?"

This one, Will has no doubts on. "Because it would make him happy, and I want to make him happy."

It sounds a hell of a lot more romantic when Will leaves off the ending of that statement, where he wants to make Hannibal happy because it means he'll keep fucking him.

"Okay," Jack says quietly, like he's considering that the answer he'd been searching for. "I still want to talk to Hannibal."

"Be my guest."

Jack drops the matter there, but a headache is already well underway for Will. They had started increasing in frequency near the end of his little vacation with Hannibal, likely due to the stress. He's used to them but that doesn't mean he is unaffected.

The second victim's boss gives them nothing of particular interest, and neither does the third victim's friend. It's irritating, trying Will's patience to make him waste his time like this, and the headache intensifies. He must still be tired because it's getting harder and harder for him to string his thoughts together, to the point where Jack notices while they're on the way to the person who found the first body. "Will, are you feeling alright?"

"Yes," he lies, instinctively. "No. Headache."

Jack frowns and leans closer. In the past, he probably would have placed a hand on Will's forehead, but he knows that's not an option any longer. "You're still healing. You looked flushed. Might have a fever."

"I'm fine," Will lies again. It's just so automatic at this point. "Might have a fever."

"Go home after this one." Jack's fingers tap along the steering wheel. "These aren't really giving us anything helpful anyways, and the next one's the one I wanted your insight on the most."

"I can get through them."

"I don't want you to 'get through them'," Jack sighs. "I want you to get better."

"That…" It can't be argued against, unfortunately. Will crosses his arms. "Fine. If you insist."

"You should let Hannibal know if you're sick," Jack adds, almost as an afterthought. Suspicions aside he seems to have accepted the fact that they're together as reality.

Will almost asks why, because Hannibal would probably just find a way to make it worse. Caring and protective, that's what they're going with. "I guess," he grumbles, which is easy enough to pass off as his own natural aversion to accepting help of any kind. He's half expecting Hannibal to somehow know and show up at his house on his own.

There's actually a very high chance Hannibal will just turn up at his house for no reason regardless. It's been a couple days since they've seen each other, since Jack insisted on Will taking it easy for the first couple of days when he came back before getting into the new case. He was doing paperwork which made him think this was something of a punishment.

They finally arrive at the house of the person who found the first body. Will is starting to feel off-balance, head fogging, and he thinks Jack is probably right about him running a fever. He hopes it doesn't show on his face. They ascend the steps to the front door and knock.

A man opens the door, middle-aged and generally uninteresting to look at. He scans them both and then his eyes lock directly onto Will.

Great. It's going to be one of these.

“You’re from the BAU, right?” Despite his words, he’s only looking at Will when he talks. “Come in. I’ve been expecting you.”

Jack glances at Will, brow furrowed, before nodding. “Jack Crawford, and this is Will Graham. We would like to ask you some questions about the body you found.”

“How very nice to meet you,” he replies, overly sweet, and Will really has to choke down the urge to roll his eyes. It’s not a habit he usually has but he finds himself in a lot more situations that call for it than normal, recently.

Will’s empathy is an incredibly useful tool in interviews but there are occasions where the package it comes in serves as nothing but a detriment. It feels absolutely ridiculous for Will to outright admit to himself that he’s attractive. What’s undeniable is that he’s attractive in a *specific way;* one that catches Alphas’ attentions. Never enough for them to outright pursue him but always enough for them to treat him like a pretty little thing, to play the little game of sweet talking and flirtations despite Will’s utter refusal to play along even in the slightest. It’s never serious, they can tell he’s a Beta and it won’t go anywhere, and all it really does is make the interview process harder and really piss Will off.

He had been hoping the mating bite would put a stop to it, but if they were already ignoring the fact that he wasn’t an Omega, what’s one more thing to just ignore?

They’re led through an extremely normal house into a living room that looks ripped straight out of a catalogue. It’s normal to the point that it actually sets Will on edge, like it’s trying *too* hard to be a typical American home. That’s not anything to be concerned about in and of itself but something about the place… unsettles Will. He feels prickly and on guard in here.

Maybe it’s the fever. It feels warm, like his skin is sticking to his clothes. Humid. Maybe it’s the Alpha’s piercing gaze. He shakes his head and Jack looks towards him with concern.

“Can I get you anything to drink?” the man offers.

“No, we won’t be here long.” Jack takes a seat on an offered couch and Will sits beside him, trying to halt the trembling in his hands. “Would you mind if we took a look at your ID, Mr…” He glances at his notepad. “Smith?”

“Please, call me James.” Even his name is generic. “Now where did I put my wallet…” The man stands, glancing around the room, eyes finally landing on an end table right next to Will. Naturally, because nothing good ever happens to Will, there is a wallet on it. “Ah. Excuse me.” The man leans over, nearly across Will to grab the wallet, and the inhale as he does so is unmistakable. Will’s skin prickles with disgust. “Just one moment…” The man stands back up, rifling through the wallet before extracting his ID and handing it to Will. Their fingers brush as he hands it over before finally sitting back down.

Will focuses on the ID to distract himself from the way the Alpha had just scented him like that, out in the open. *James Smith,* the Virginia license tells him. 42 years old, 5’8”, brown hair, brown eyes. Sex: male, classification-

He stops and reads it again, hoping maybe that the letters will change. They don't. Classification: Beta.

Wordlessly, he passes the ID over to Jack, and from his pause he can tell the man noticed the same thing he had.

Ever the professional, Jack hands it back over and smoothly transitions into questioning. "Just to verify that we have the correct information, you are male and a Beta?"

"That's correct," the man answers, and he seems to be telling the truth. Will isn't infallible but there's no real reason to hide the fact that he's an Alpha at this point. If he's not an Alpha, why the hell had he scented Will? Just to fuck with him?

It's ultimately irrelevant, beyond bothering him.

The man is cooperative and answers every question dutifully as they go over the basics again; where the body was found, what time, did you see anything suspicious- it's ultimately a pretty normal interview, and even the part where the interviewee feeds all their answers back to Will regardless of who had asked them isn't exactly a noteworthy occurrence. He keeps leaning forwards too, trying to invade Will's space despite the coffee table between them. Maybe he should consider getting 'NOT AN OMEGA' tattooed across his forehead.

Distantly, he wonders if that Omega he met at the bar had been lying when he said Will could pass for either. Probably not. Even if he looked the part, you can't replicate the sheer presence of an Alpha.

There's one part of the interview that catches Will's attention, and Jack notices it as well. They're talking about the body and the man says "I can't stop thinking about that poor girl. She didn't deserve that."

Jack pauses, because as far as they know all of the victims were male. "Was the body you found that of a woman?"

"Was it?" The answer comes smoothly, an exaggerated frown on the man's face. "It was a horrible experience, so the details might be a bit fuzzy. All I remember is how beautiful they were, so I may have just assumed."

"Of course," Jack nods. They have records of previous interviews with this man where he correctly identified the body as male. Absolutely nothing they have found from the victim's loved ones or online presence indicates that they were actually a woman, so it seems less like this man knows something they shouldn't and more like a genuine mistake.

But it's a mistake that doesn't make sense. Genuine might not be the right way to describe it.

They don't want the man to catch on to their suspicions so Jack resumes the interview, and the rest of it proceeds without incident. Will's headache increases and makes it hard to focus, and he knows the fever is worsening. It shows on his face and the man seems to pay even more attention to him than before, which just makes him feel even worse. It's prickly, like there's something stuck under his skin that he wants to rip out.

That's probably why Jack cuts the interview short. They excuse themselves and Jack basically herds Will into the car, throwing his notebook in the back seat and pulling out of the driveway faster than normal. "Right. I'm taking you to the hospital."

"Come on," Will groans. He closes his eyes and tips his head back against the seat in a futile effort to stop the world from spinning. "I'm fine."

"You're burning up."

"Just take me home," he sighs. "I'll call Hannibal. I promise."

"Hannibal may be a doctor, but he does not have access to the equipment and medication the hospital does."

Hannibal has a cabinet full of many things he shouldn't legally have, but Will isn't exactly going to bring that up. "He'll know who to get in contact with to get them. Connections speed everything up."

"Will," Jack starts, but Will interrupts him.

"Please," he says quietly. "I just want to go home."

Jack is silent for a moment before a low growl escapes his throat and Will feels the car changing course. "I'm calling Hannibal for you."

"Funny that you're fine relying on him now." It's petty, sharper than intended.

"I trust you by yourself even less," Jack fires back, and the blow was absolutely deserved. Accurate, too. The steering wheel squeaks as hands tighten on it. "That probably wasn't a fun interview for you."

Will shrugs. "It was weird. He felt off. No reason for him to have suddenly forgotten the sex of the intact corpse he found."

"Shock can do weird things to people."

"He was lying. Wanted to make it seem like he knew less than he did, or like he was an unreliable witness so he can walk back anything he says later."

"Why lie about something we can disprove so easily?"

Another shrug. "Never said he was smart about it."

Jack sighs. "I'll keep your suspicions in mind. We can talk more about this later, when you're healthy."

"Yes sir," Will mutters. The world is still spinning despite his best efforts. Grudgingly, he accepts that Jack is right and he's probably sick. It's never a good idea to work on a murder case when you might not be in your right mind. He keeps talking anyways. "I don't think he was lying about being a Beta, either."

“Maybe he just didn’t want to contradict a legal document in front of law enforcement.”

“I don’t think he was lying,” Will reiterates.

“Right,” Jack replies. “Okay. I believe you,” he adds quickly, before Will can say something back. “I’m just not sure that’s relevant.”

“It’s relevant to his obnoxious behavior,” Will grumbles, and he can hear a snort of laughter from Jack in the driver’s seat.

“I’ll do my best to make sure you don’t have to talk to him again.”

“Appreciated.”

The rest of the drive back to Will’s house is done in companionable silence.

When he gets dropped off he makes Jack promise to keep him updated if anything happens, when Jack grudgingly agrees to. Jack, much less emptily, also promises to have someone come drop off his car later since it got left at Quantico in the process.

He’s really making a much bigger deal out of this than he needs to be.

Speaking of making a much bigger deal out of things. It takes a couple hours for Hannibal’s sleek Bentley to pull up to Will’s house, at which point Will is doing yardwork. In lieu of a greeting Hannibal simply picks Will up, forcing him to drop the rake he’d been using to clean up leaves, and carries him right back inside the house and up the stairs. “Hello to you too,” Will mutters from over the man’s shoulder.

“You are ill. The last thing you should be doing is physical labor.”

“Maybe Jack just made that up to get rid of me.” He’s tossed onto his bed a bit harder than was necessary, so even hearing Jack’s name must piss Hannibal off.

“I can smell the fever on you.” Hannibal’s nose wrinkles, and he turns his head away. “Perhaps you should shower.”

“I thought you liked the way I smelled?”

“That is why I would like you to shower.”

Oh. Will considers his options here. Despite his bravado, Will *is* feeling pretty shitty, and it feels like it’s getting worse. His vision had kept going out of focus when he was raking and there were times when he had nearly lost his balance. As fun as it would be to make Hannibal lose his reason again, it would be much smarter to actually try and get some rest.

For once, Will lets himself be smarter. “Alright,” he sighs. “I’ll go get cleaned up. Feel free to just.” He looks around the room, struggling to locate something that would interest Hannibal. “Lurk.”

The corner of Hannibal's mouth twitches up in what Will has long since learned is amusement. "I shall lurk in your kitchen." Will is halfway to the bathroom when Hannibal calls out to him again. "Do you need any assistance?"

"Doesn't that defeat the point?" Will calls back, a bundle of clothes to change into under his arm.

"It would," Hannibal agrees, which is rare. "I would still be remiss not to offer it."

"I'll be fine." Maybe if he says it with enough confidence, it'll become true.

The hot shower is pleasant, but it also feels like it's sapping away all his energy. Actually giving his body time to rest makes how awful he feels really hit home. He's in there for longer than normal and he's not really sure how he's going to deal with his healing bite after.

Thankfully, Hannibal seems to come to the same conclusion, and once a suitable amount of time has passed after turning the water off there is a knock at the door. "Are you decent?"

"No, but I have clothes on." The room seems to shimmer, and Will blinks to try and dispel the illusion. The door opens and sends ripples through the air. "Damn," he mutters, since his effort clearly failed.

A hand presses against his forehead, damp with condensation instead of sweat for the time being. "Your fever is increasing. Can you make it back to your bed unassisted?"

"Yeah," Will says, because he can figure something out. He's standing right now so he just has to walk, right? He looks down at his legs and sees that he's sitting on the toilet. "Damn," he says again.

Something in his tone must have given him away because Hannibal gently lifts him up and carries him back to his bed. "Sit up," Hannibal tells him, arranging pillows on the headboard. "I need to see to your wound and then you should eat before sleeping. How is your appetite?"

"Exists." Will tips his head forwards and lets Hannibal treat and bandage the wound. "How's it looking?"

"Nearly healed," Hannibal tells him, very obviously pleased. "Another week at most. You've been taking good care of it."

"Of course I have," Will scoffs, mildly outraged that Hannibal would imply that he'd be irresponsible about it. Hannibal helps him sit back against the pillows and arranges the blankets as Will crosses his arms in front of him. "So, doctor, what do you think? Meningitis? Ebola? Prions?"

Hannibal's eyes scan his body before returning to his face. "Likely nothing more than the flu."

"Boring," Will mutters, and that makes Hannibal turn away from him and head back downstairs, into the kitchen. Should he tell Hannibal about the visual disturbances? He decides that they aren't particularly relevant and keeps them to himself.

He smells the food before he sees it, what ends up being a steaming bowl of broth and meat. “Black silkie chicken with red dates,” Hannibal tells him, only handing over the bowl when he’s certain Will can hold it steady.

It smells amazing and probably tastes even better. “Wow, Campbell’s has really stepped up their game, huh?” The expected flash of irritation materializes in no time, and Will hides his smile behind the spoon as he takes his first sip. “Oh, this is really good. Thank you, Hannibal.”

“Anything for you, my dear,” Hannibal responds, and Will has to tighten his grip on the spoon to not drop it at the endearment. It’s a pretty even toss up if Hannibal is using it for the normal reason or just to see what reaction it draws out of Will.

Well, it’s only fair if they’re both doing it, Will supposes.

While he eats the meal Hannibal moves throughout his bedroom, tidying things up that didn’t need to be tidied and organizing things the way he likes it. Exercising control. The house will be neat and clean the way Hannibal wants it to be, despite the glaring detail of it not even being his own damn house. He knows the process will continue once he sleeps and half expects to wake up to a completely different building, if that was even possible.

Will has never been a particularly prideful person, thankfully, at least not in this specific way. Hannibal can alphabetize his books for however he needs to to leave his mark on the house even when he does not reside within it. The most interesting part is probably how brazen he’s being about it.

The room spins. When it stops, Hannibal is arranging the antlers on the wall- no, that’s not right. Will sets the bowl on a bedside table and scrunches his eyes closed, rubbing at them with his palms. The bed dips beside him and a warm hand lands between his shoulder blades. “Will, are you alright?”

“Sure.” He opens his eyes and looks back to the antlers, which have reformed back into paintings and photos. Some are propped against the wall next to new ones he knows he definitely did not own and there is a pile being made, presumably for disposal. “Maybe I have a deep personal connection to that Thomas Kinkade painting.” It still has the sticker from the garage sale he’d bought it at on the back.

“Then all the more reason to remove it. What did you see?”

“Antlers,” Will admits. The hand moves to his forehead and clearly finds something it dislikes, because now Will is being pushed down into the bed with the pillows following.

“Your fever is still rising. Rest, and I will keep an eye on you.”

Of course you will, Will doesn’t say. “Sure,” he says instead. “Thanks,” he adds, as an afterthought. It’s getting harder to focus.

Sleep is normally something that eludes Will. Maybe he’s just tired. Maybe it’s because he knows Hannibal is here, and can trust him in some way. Whatever the reason, Will falls

asleep quickly.

Will wakes up. The room is dark and oddly silent, so it has to be the middle of the night. Odder still is how there's no illumination anywhere, not even the moonlight through the windows. He can't remember if there's a new moon tonight or not. When he sits up pain laces through his head, and he hisses.

He raises his head as his eyes adjust to the darkness. Normally he can see his dogs scattered across the bedroom and he strains to locate that familiar sight. His vision twists and pulses, pain lancing through his head once more, and he drops his head into his hands. Until the spinning passes, he closes his eyes, intensifying the nausea but stabilizing it. When it stops feeling like the bed is moving under him he opens his eyes once more and tries to look up.

Just barely, in the darkness, he can see something. It's tall, reaches the ceiling, a wavering, undefined thing. "Hannibal…?" Will says, voice cracking. It looks too large to be a human but something about it… makes him think it's him.

He blinks, and the shadow is closer. He can make out limbs now, slightly too long, legs bent the wrong way and something erupting from its head. Another blink and it's even closer. Antlers, wickedly sharp. That's what's on its head. Will feels like he can't take his eyes off this creature or something terrible will happen. A blink and the pain returns, forcing his head down, eyes wrenched shut as a ringing pierces through his ears. He can feel the foot of the bed dip as something climbs on top of it and he forces his head up just high enough to see through the excruciating pain.

It's on the bed. It stares at him, eyes a blazing red, a gaze he knows all too well. "Hannibal," he chokes, words sticking in his throat. "Why-"

In a flash the creature is on him, pinning him to the bed, one clawed hand around his throat-

Will wakes up. He sits bolt upright, panting, and he can tell the end of a scream has slipped out of him. His entire body feels tacky with sweat. There's a shuffling around him, dogs milling around with concern, and a familiar voice. "Will, is everything okay?" Hannibal reaches for him, and Will slaps his hand away on instinct.

"Sorry," he says quickly, trying not to focus on the small moment Hannibal freezes, incensed by the rejection. "Nightmare. Sorry." His head throbs, so at least that part was real.

"Your fever has not broken." The words are clipped. "If anything, it has climbed higher. One moment."

Something is wheeled towards him; maybe a cart, or an IV stand. It sounds like nails on a chalkboard. "What time is-"

“Please lay back down.” A hand on his chest does not give him time to comply of his own volition. “Remain still.”

“What-” A needle pierces his arm, and then all that follows is darkness.

If he dreams, he does not remember.

In the end, it takes Will two days to shake the fever. He wakes up feeling like everything is much clearer than before, blessedly free from pain. The needle in his arm leads to an IV bag on a stand and he wants to believe that’s what it had always been attached to.

He sits up with a groan. Buster, ever the troublemaker, jumps up onto his bed as he sees his owner rouse.

A sharp click of Hannibal’s tongue has the dog jumping right back down, and Will watches the terrier trot away with mild amazement. He can hear a bookmark slide into a book, followed by the sound of it being set on a bedside table. “Are you feeling better?”

“I… think so?” The room isn’t throbbing anymore when he looks around it, and he certainly feels a great deal more lucid than before. He looks back towards the IV. “Was it really that bad?”

“Your fever was significant, but not beyond what was in my ability to treat.” Hannibal moves to the other side of the bed and quickly and professionally removes the IV and starts packing up the bag. “Had it not broken today I likely would have taken you to the hospital.”

“Small miracles.” Will’s body feels weak, almost like he’d been ravaged by a fever for several days. “I- were you here the whole time?”

“Of course.” Hannibal glances at Will like he’s wondering why Will possibly could have ever thought otherwise.

“What about your patients?”

“As I’ve said before, I drastically dialed back the amount of patients seen once I began working with the FBI. It was trivial to reschedule what few existed.”

“You didn’t have to-” He stops himself. “No, nevermind, you’re just going to say something like ‘of course I did’. I’ll skip that part and go straight to ‘thank you’.”

“Efficient,” Hannibal answers with a tiny smile. “I am relieved to see you feeling better. There have not been any new developments in your case, so rest easy knowing you have missed nothing.”

“Great. It’s always a good sign when the investigation immediately stagnates.” Will sighs. “Have you gone in at all?” Stupid question, since they had just gone over how Hannibal had not left Will’s house.

For once, Hannibal is kind enough to ignore the mistake. “Jack has asked me to stop by when you seem well enough to be on your own. We’ve only spoken over the phone until now.”

A look out the window confirms it to be late morning, possibly early afternoon. “So you should have time today.” Will swings his legs off the bed and tries to stand up, only to stumble once his feet hit the ground. Hannibal catches him easily.

“Careful. While I was able to keep you hydrated, you still have not eaten for several days and are quite weak.”

“I’m sure you love that,” Will mutters, and the hand steadying him on his upper arm tightens. “Noted. I think I can stand.”

Slowly, Hannibal releases his grip, ready to catch Will should he fall again. Like a newborn foal learning to walk, Will takes several shaky steps forwards, getting used to dealing with the weakness and balancing himself. “You should recover quickly once you get more nourishment. Whatever it was that afflicted you, no trace of it seems to remain.”

“How do you-” Will cuts himself off, as usual, when he looks up and sees Hannibal scenting the air. Right, he can smell it. “Any idea what was wrong with me, now?”

“Considering the season, likely nothing more than a particularly nasty flu.”

“Fun.” He straightens up, staying near the wall in case he has to steady himself. “Does that usually make you hallucinate?”

There, just barely, Hannibal hesitates. “A high fever can do many things. You seemed to experience terrible nightmares as well.”

Great. Well, he already knows that Hannibal won’t let him die, so if he’s hiding anything it can’t be *that* serious. He can worry about this later. “Nightmares aren’t really fever exclusive, but good to know.”

“If hallucinations continue without the fever it would be cause for concern. For the time being, you should have nothing to worry about.”

“Cool. I’m going to take a shower. Should be fine on my own,” he adds, once he sees Hannibal take a step towards him. “If I’m wrong I’ll start screaming at the top of my lungs or something.”

“Very well.” Hannibal backs off. “I’ll have a meal waiting for you when you finish.”

Without another word, Will nods and slowly makes his way to the bathroom. As long as he does everything slowly, it seems manageable, which is good because something is absolutely burning a hole in his brain right now.

That dream. That was… probably not a good dream. He *knows* Hannibal is hiding some part of him, something even darker than what he’s already seen. His subconscious is screaming at him to get away.

He doesn’t really want to, though. Maybe there’s a part of *himself* that Will should be scared of, too.

Hannibal, true to word, has a veritable feast waiting for Will, and it tastes like the best thing he's ever eaten in his life. It probably is, everything Hannibal makes probably is, but the ravenous hunger he hadn't noticed until the aroma hit him makes it even better. They eat, and then, remarkably, Hannibal makes sure that Will is going to be okay and leaves to go to Quantico.

Though he was overbearing in other ways, Hannibal hadn't tried to do anything with Will the entire time he'd been here. He truly had just come to take care of Will. Not acting like a lover, but a mate.

Are they mates? "Um." Will thinks aloud. "I guess, technically?" He had let Hannibal bite him, and had made his intentions to return said bite well known. That would, to most people, make them mates. "Huh." The term doesn't hold much weight to Will, but he knows it means a great deal to Hannibal. "Mates it is," he decides. He thinks he's fine with that.

Now that Hannibal has gone, leaving behind a fridge full of meals, Will methodically goes through his house to find out what has changed. Mostly the decor, with every single one of his paintings having been replaced, possibly burned. Hannibal apparently is more approving of his taste in photographs as those mostly remain, albeit moved around. His dishes are plain but high quality, nary a chip in sight, with his silverware in similar condition. When he gets to his bookcases they seem to mostly have been reorganized, with some new additions snuck in. All the stupid little trinkets Will had accumulated over the course of his life, ceramic dogs and fish, all of them have mysteriously vanished. Vases line the mantelpiece, thick and sturdy when he touches them, the kind of thing that would likely survive a fall to the floor should it be knocked off by a dog. Some have water and flowers, others have dried branches and bone. An odd assortment.

On his way to the stairs he presses a key on the old dusty piano, wincing when it screeches back at him. Piano tuning must have been a bit too far outside of Hannibal's area of expertise.

The rooms he uses for storage have new boxes in them, so it seems like Hannibal was kind enough to pack away some of his removed belongings instead of simply destroying them. There's nothing much to see up there since Will barely uses the second floor himself, beyond his bedroom and the bathroom.

All in all, he'd estimate approximately half of his things have been rearranged or replaced. The furniture that isn't his bed all look very similar but strangely high quality, and he's not sure a single item of clothing he previously had still remains in the home. Similar to the furniture, the casual wear is mostly higher quality versions of what existed previously, and seeing new flannels makes him do a double take. His taste was apparently taken into consideration, though given far less weight than Hannibal's own. The ratio of flannels to nice button up shirts is certainly skewed far in the opposite direction than before. There's a blazer hung in the closet and he wouldn't even have been surprised to find an entire suit.

His shoes, amusingly, have not changed, save for the addition of a nice pair of dress shoes. That was the one item of clothing that Will spent proper money on, since a good pair of shoes will last you a very long time, and Hannibal appeared to agree.

There's one last place to check and he's not sure he wants to. Since the entire dresser has changed it's not like it's a secret and besides, Hannibal had given most of them to Will himself.

Most being the key word. Will sighs, crouches down, and opens the wide bottom drawer of the dresser.

The sex toys are so nicely organized that he can't decide if this is hysterical or cripplingly humiliating. It's easier to deal with the former. Notably, Hannibal has organized them in a way that leaves the largest on top, and appears to have included some very specific cleaning supplies in the middle. There are things in here Will has never in his life seen before. He picks up something metal, and based on the curved, cage-like structure and the long metal rod in the center there's really only one thing it can be for.

Like hell he's letting Hannibal use this on him. Maybe he can use it to crack walnuts.

He slides the drawer shut with another sigh. Most people would find something like this terrifying, right? Hannibal had literally redecorated his entire house without his permission, all while he was sick with a fever. Most people would probably find this incredibly violating.

Will's not really sure what to make of the fact that he mostly finds it amusing. It's like a child writing their name on their favorite toy, just to make sure everyone else knows it's theirs.

At least he can be confident that he's more than just a toy to Hannibal. His fingers raise to the back of his neck, gently pressing on the bandages, and he can't help but be disappointed when it doesn't even sting.

All throughout the day his mind keeps going back to it. The drawer. It had been almost exclusively toys for anal before, what Hannibal had given him and what he'd bought himself in the period between being given the rest and Hannibal's rut. Hannibal had decided to expand his collection, apparently. He'd seen cock rings, fleshlights, thin rods that were almost certainly for sounding, and much more. There were a couple new dildos too, one of which caught Will's eye, because…

He's not going to be able to focus on work at all if he doesn't figure this out. So that night, he sees to his dogs out, cleans up, and then closes the bedroom door behind him.

Will slides open the drawer again. The dildo in question is dead center, clearly placed to be the most prominent, and he picks it up and examines it. It's a bit larger than the largest Hannibal had given him before, has a small knot at the end, and bizarrely, it's a deep red color.

He's about 90% sure that this is Hannibal's dick.

The size is correct (is it? Was it always this huge?) and the odd color choice screams Hannibal. Getting a mold of his penis made is exactly the sort of thing he'd expect from the man, as is quietly shoving it into Will's wardrobe and letting him discover it for himself. The 10% of doubt is mostly because of how insane the whole idea feels. He runs his finger down it, trying to recognize the veins and contours, but it just feels like a dildo. In his defense,

Hannibal usually wastes no time shoving it inside, so Will doesn't really get many opportunities to touch the man's cock with his hands.

There is *one* way he'd be able to tell pretty quickly. It sits in his hands, large and intimidating, mocking him.

It's about ten inches long. There's no way that could fit inside of him, right? But the one he's *definitely* fit in there isn't more than an inch shorter and the knots at the base are the same size. *Much smaller than in reality,* his brain helpfully reminds him, and considering the entire point of a knot it makes sense that ones on toys would be smaller. He's not really sure how you'd take a mold of that specific part of anatomy anyways. That thought brings his gaze back to the drawer, where he sees another, smaller dildo, this one with some sort of cable ending in a plunger hanging off the bottom, and the material used feels different, looser-

He depresses the plunger and sees something swell at the base of the dildo. An inflatable knot. That makes sense. He drops that dildo back with the rest. As he does so, something jiggles, and he pulls it out with a faint frown.

It's made of some translucent jelly-like material, squishy and stretchable, and you're clearly supposed to put your dick in it. Will looks at the sleeve and then looks at the red dildo. Slowly, he inserts the tip of the dildo in the sleeve, watching it stretch and distort obscenely around the massive toy. It barely reaches halfway down the cock and he half expects it to be split open under the sheer size of the intrusion.

He pulls the sleeve off and it springs back into shape like nothing even happened. Will swallows and reaches for some lube.

As much as he wants to just shove the dildo up him right away, it's been a bit since he's had sex with Hannibal, and alone like this he doesn't have the benefit of the oppressive weight of the other man, of being held down, pinned in place, the thrill of excitement that it brings. So he compromises, goes straight for a large plug, sliding it inside of himself with a generous amount of lube and sheer determination. The stretch is uncomfortable but not unbearable as his body yields and soon Will lays back on the bed, panting, trying to make himself relax around the toy. Masturbating out of curiosity and not a desire to masturbate may not have been the best idea, but Will's never been a quitter. He closes his eyes and wraps a hand around his cock, stroking, trying to imagine Hannibal is here with him.

"Reckless as always," Hannibal sighs. "I could have helped you with this."

"Why would you give me these if not for me to use alone?" Will replies, out loud, and thank god he lives alone.

"Future-proofing," Hannibal smiles.

"You don't give me a dildo molded after your own dick with the intention of us using that together."

"I suppose not." The Alpha is on top of him, on hands and knees, not directly touching Will but caging him in place. A hand hovers above his throat. "This is what you want, is it not? I

do not think that would be wise."

Auto-erotic asphyxiation is a great way to accidentally kill yourself, so Will can't help but agree. "Any other ideas?"

Hannibal's hand over his stops the stroking. He picks up the sleeve. "This comes to mind."

Will fumbles for the lube, holding the sleeve over the head of his cock. Once everything is slick he drags it down, encasing his dick, and it's almost unsettling how simultaneously alien and amazing it feels. It hugs him, not too tight, a stimulating pressure that expands to accommodate his dick without losing any of that tightness. No wonder Hannibal had chosen this.

"Very good, Will. Look at how it molds itself around you."

He opens his eyes and looks down, the sight of himself distorted beneath the material sending a pulse of arousal through his body. It easily morphs to surround all of him, and-

Will frowns. He's hard, and the sleeve stretches enough that his entire dick fits inside of it. Designed for Betas, probably. Still, he can't help but look over at Hannibal's dildo, sitting up to take a closer look, driving the plug deeper inside and making it crush up against his prostate. It starts a feedback loop and Will has to close his eyes and steady his breathing to calm himself back down. He's certainly in the mood *now.*

Now that he thinks about it, he's definitely felt Hannibal's cock a lot more often than he's directly seen it. Holding the dildo next to his own dick the difference is… apparent. It's not like Will's is small, he's never busted out a ruler but he's at worst average for a Beta, maybe larger. He hasn't exactly seen the dicks of enough Betas to come to an objective conclusion on that. Hannibal, however, is large even for an Alpha, and for some reason that fact is just perfectly reasonable on its own. He doesn't need to see anyone else to know that this is *big.*

"You enjoy it," Hannibal tells him, despite the fact that Will's eyes are wide open and there's no one else in the room with him. It's frighteningly easy to envision the man right here, speaking to him. Almost automatic. *"I gave this to you, so you should use it."*

"Okay," Will answers. "Yeah, I will."

He lays back down, taking his hands off the sleeve for the time being. It's difficult to take the plug out, his body clings to it tightly, unwilling to release the source of pleasure. "For fuck's sake," he mutters, trying to ignore the ripples of heat as he tries to maneuver the plug out, pressing it against his prostate instead. He needs to be distracted from this feeling, but pulling off the sleeve would be too dangerous.

This is a stupid idea and Will is going to do it anyways. The red dildo is heavy, has some heft. He holds it up above his chest and lets go.

"Motherfucker," he hisses, after it's slammed into him and rolled off to the side. He likes the way it stings but it also distracts him enough that he can finally pull the plug out, freeing himself.

He must look absolutely ridiculous.

That's something he steadfastly ignores. He's alone, after all, even if he can easily see Hannibal's raised eyebrows if he closes his eyes. If he can tolerate judgement from the real thing, he can tolerate it from the phantom he's created too. Instead he grabs the lube again and lifts his hips, lining up the head of the dildo, and starts sliding it inside.

It's definitely Hannibal's. He's not really sure how to feel about the fact that his ass identifies it so quickly so he simply ignores that as well in favor of focusing on how he stretches around it, how his body easily welcomes it inside. He's not even thinking about his large and impossible it seemed when he pushes it home, over the knot, fully seated inside of him. It feels *right.*

"Sit up," Hannibal tells him.

Will sits up.

Immediately he is far more keenly aware of the pressure inside of him, the intrusion pressing against his walls, and his body clenches around it. It's locked in place now, can't slip or move, just a constant fill, a comforting reminder that he's not alone.

Not literally. *"Of course it wasn't meant literally," Hannibal chimes in,* and that sounds a lot more like Will himself now. Maybe he's slipping. Who could blame him? With such an incredible feeling, deep inside, how could he be expected to think of anything else?

Will closes a hand around the sleeve and starts to jerk himself off. It squishes around his fingers, magnifying the grip of his hand, making lewd squelching noises as he moves it. Together, they make him shiver, the moving, sucking sensation on his dick and the rock solid presence inside of him. When he shifts, rubbing the dildo inside of him, it sends lightning up his spine. Gently, he starts to move forwards and backwards on the bed, tiny little movements, just to remind him the dildo is there.

"You've become quite addicted to it."

"Shut up," Will groans, the absurdity of the situation setting in. He can just *make* this Hannibal shut up.

Apparently, he doesn't want to. *"Did you ever consider this possibility? That once I fucked you, it would change you, irreversibly."*

"It didn't." Will moves the sleeve faster, skin flushing, sweat starting to slip down his spine. He feels warm, on fire.

"Yet it did, didn't it? You never would have done this before you'd known."

"Known what?" Will snaps, at nothing. He doesn't think he could stop his movements if he tried.

"What I could give you. What you needed."

“I don’t *need* this.”

“You do,” Hannibal calmly responds. “Even now, you feel that this is a pale imitation.”

It is. He hates to admit it, as good as it feels, but it’s still just silicone and gel, fake, colder, impersonal. It feels good but it *only* feels good. There’s no hand around his throat, no iron grip around his wrists, bruising and pressing him so hard into the mattress that he struggles to breathe. There’s no burning hot flesh, no teeth tearing into him, no pain, no *Hannibal.*

“Fuck you,” Will snarls, and he comes, filling the sleeve with his semen. The phantom fades away, smiling.

He lays back on the bed for a while, panting, until the toys become uncomfortable. The sleeve comes free with a *pop* and he winces as he extracts the dildo, now far too large to bear inside of him.

It *had* felt good. It had also felt empty.

On some level, it makes sense. Will had never really been the type to masturbate alone and had always assumed he just had a low sex drive. Being with Hannibal is making him reconsider his position.

Semen and lube leaks out of the sleeve and Will grimaces. It’s not disposable, so he has to clean it somehow. With a sigh he looks back in the still open sex drawer, fishing around for cleaning supplies, and takes everything into the bathroom to try and figure things out.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Most of the porn is in this one, so have fun!

Hannibal hadn't been exaggerating when he said Will hadn't missed anything at work. He comes back to find the team already antsy and snappy, which always happens when they hit a dead end. At least Hannibal is here to help. Usually, he's the voice of reason, which is kind of incredible in retrospect.

That can be a low bar, sometimes.

Jack isn't present which is probably a good thing since he's obviously had his little talk with Hannibal, based on the brief but incredibly tense greeting they exchanged. Price and Zeller are arguing over something off to the side and Beverly is hunched over a stack of papers looking like she's about to pull her hair out when Will enters the room, Hannibal trailing behind him. "This seems like it's going well," Will mutters.

"Will!" Price catches his attention. "Over here. Does this look like a bite mark to you?"

He heads over and accepts the photo handed to him, which turns out to be a photo of the most recent victim. The body was pretty heavily mutilated but what he's handed is a close up of the arm with some sort of curved wound on it. It does indeed look like a bite wound. "Yeah, it does. The pattern is consistent with human teeth, at least from what I can tell in this photo." He hands it over to Hannibal for his opinion.

"On the arm?" Zeller scowls. "Why on earth would the vic have been bitten on the *arm?* "

"Desperation," Hannibal supplies. "When the bite did nothing they may have bitten everywhere they could have reached in a futile attempt to force the connection." He hands the photo over and points to a part of it. "I agree that it seems like a bite wound, but look here, where the incisors would have pierced. It looks like the teeth that made the wound were blunt."

"Uh, yeah?" Zeller responds. "It's from a human?"

"No, you idiot," Price snaps. "Alphas and Omegas have sharper teeth than Betas, particularly the incisors. Related to the whole mating bite thing."

"An Alpha can still have blunter teeth, right?" Will glances at Hannibal, who nods in agreement. "It narrows down the field of suspects, but not much. Why are you looking at photos and not the body?"

Price looks like he's about to rip the photo in two, and Zeller openly scowls. The one who replies ends up being Beverly from across the room, synchronized with her throwing photos of her own down onto the table in frustration. "Because the dumbass cops who handled this one caved to pressure from the family and returned the body to them, along with all the deceased's belongings. It's been fucking cremated. We don't have a shred of evidence from the most recent victim."

No wonder everyone is so pissed off. "Wait, seriously? For an unsolved crime?"

"The victim was the son of a very wealthy family," Hannibal explains. "They used their influence to force the premature return of the remains."

"More interested in putting the scandal behind them than actually solving the murder," Will mutters. "You know we're going to have to ask the public for tips, right?"

Everyone in the room save Hannibal groans. "Please, no," Beverly grumbles. "Not the tip line."

"There are *so* many bodies in the morgue I have to deal with," Price lies, very unconvincingly. "Zeller can help you guys in my place."

"Excuse me?"

"He's right," Hannibal says, loud enough to catch everyone's attention. "Waiting until a fourth victim turns up is not a viable solution, and this would serve to warn the public of danger as well."

The groan returns, because everyone knows he's right. Beverly volunteers to go convince Jack.

While she's gone, the rest of them catch Will up on what little he missed, mostly confirming the details of the case they've inherited. Jack agrees with the idea of a tip line for this specific case but it takes him some time to convince his superiors that the pros outweigh the cons, and part of how he does that is by volunteering his own team to help man the lines. If something potentially relevant to their case gets called in it gets sent to them.

They draw straws to see who has to answer the phone each day.

A week passes with very little advancement in the case, though ironically a tip they received turns out to be genuine, if entirely unrelated. They end up solving a completely different crime because of it, so at least something good came out of their time.

The bite mark heals and once the bandages come off Prize, Zeller, and Katz all try to very surreptitiously position themselves behind Will throughout the day to try and catch a glimpse. He gets so sick of it that he finally just confronts them and shows them the bite directly, something that makes a very quickly smothered rumble come from Hannibal. It hadn't *sounded* like a growl.

Once a couple days go by with no developments, Will goes to speak to Jack. He makes Hannibal wait outside.

He raps on the door frame to announce his presence and Jack waves him in. “You need something, Will?”

“Yeah, uh.” He hadn’t been expecting the part where he asks for a day off to be quite so awkward. “Would it be okay if I came in late tomorrow?”

“What for?”

“Well, um.” Will rubs the back of his neck, a sheepish gesture that actually helps him make his point for once.

It clicks for Jack. “Oh. Yeah, uh. You guys are still pretty stuck on your case, right?” While their team is Jack’s priority, as head of the BAU he has plenty of other work to keep him busy.

“Price and Zeller are trying to sculpt the third victim’s body in Blender and talking about trying to get it 3D printed. Beverly is trying to get purchase logs for the specific style shirt she’s pretty certain the third victim was wearing when they were abducted. I, uh.” Will and Hannibal have created over a hundred theoretical killer profiles based on the facts they have and have barely managed to eliminate any of them as improbable. “Yes. We’re still stuck.”

Jack sighs like he wishes he could get someone fired for how the most recent case was bungled. “Are you planning on tonight, then?”

“Unless something comes up.”

“Right.” Jack is glancing around the room like he’s worried Hannibal is going to crawl out of a ceiling tile to attack him at any moment. “Good luck. Congratulations?” Even Will winces at how awkward that one was. “Just take tomorrow off,” Jack mutters. “Both of you. And you can take off for the day whenever you’re finished with what you’re currently doing.”

“Got it. Thanks.” Will feels so stiff he nearly salutes Jack before leaving.

Hannibal, who had been waiting in the hall, falls in step with Will easily. “Is it safe to assume it went well?”

“Not as far as my comfort levels go. But yeah, he said it’s fine, and we can leave whenever.”

Before replying Hannibal glances at his watch. “There is still some time before an early dinner would be acceptable. Let us finish with the blueprints before leaving.” They aren’t 100% on where the third victim was abducted from, since the family vehemently denies it having been from home. A wealthy, influential family would have every reason to deny the implication that their security is lacking, so they’ve taken a break from theoretical profiles to examine the blueprints and try to find possible methods of entry that could have been exploited.

“Sure.” When they get back into the meeting room they’ve taken over he can hear tidbits of an argument from behind a computer, words like ‘rigging’ and ‘A-pose’, whatever that means. Beverly had drawn the short straw and is on the phone wearing an expression like she’d love to throw it out the window if she could. “This is ridiculous,” Will sighs, sitting back down on one side of the giant blueprints they have spread out. “We’ve been reaching for a while now.”

“Yes, well.” Hannibal sits down opposite. “Should we ever decide to change careers into burglary, we have a very good starting point.”

Despite the general tension in the room, Will can’t help the tiny grin at the joke. “We decided that entering through the basement is unlikely, right?”

“Not if the fence is broken here,” Hannibal replies, leaning forwards to press a finger to the relevant portion on the blueprint.

“That’s a pretty big if.”

This leads to them trying to zoom in on the property with satellite footage to determine the status of said fence, which is absolutely ludicrous and reveals nothing. They waste the rest of their time in a similar fashion until they’ve mostly just come up with an effective plan to break into the complex themselves. Leave it to Will to plan a separate crime when trying to solve the first one.

As they take their leave Price and Zeller wave goodbye, while Beverly mouths something that looks suspiciously like *take me with you.* Will is antsy, the knowledge of what’s going to happen tonight finally sinking in and putting him on edge. They get down to the parking lot and Will halts in place, realizing they drove here separately and he has no idea where they’re going. “So, uh. Your place or mine?”

Hannibal, as per usual, seems to find amusement in Will’s discomfort. “I am open to anything, though yours may be the easiest, as it means you will not need to make arrangements for your dogs.”

“Huh.” That makes sense. “Good point. Are we just heading there, or…?”

“I’ll need to pick up some things but will make my way there after, if that would be alright with you.”

“Sure. Sounds fine.” He nods jerkily. “See you in a bit.”

“Soon, Will. I will see you soon.”

Hannibal leaves Will standing in the parking lot as he returns to his own car. After a moment, Will heads to his, sitting down heavily in the driver’s seat and taking a deep breath. “This is happening,” he tells himself. “Tonight. This is happening.”

He’s going to bite Hannibal.

Will counts to ten and starts his car, driving back to his home in Wolf Trap.

In the time he's waiting for Hannibal he lets his dogs out and tries to get them set up for the night, just in case he finds himself incapacitated. He also changes into comfy clothes, stuff that's easy to remove, and puts sheets on his bed he wouldn't mind ruining. Is this going to start the second Hannibal arrives? Is there going to be some lead up to the act?

How exactly is Will even going to do the biting? He sure has no idea himself how this is all supposed to play out. It had been his idea and he doesn't even know what the hell to do.

Things don't, in fact, start the second Hannibal arrives. He has actually brought over ingredients and cooks them dinner first, which feels surreal. For once Will has trouble appreciating the flavor.

The huge duffel bag Hannibal has brought over is incredibly distracting.

Hannibal obviously notices but does not comment on Will's behavior until after dinner, when they're washing the dishes. "Are you reconsidering?"

Will towels dry the plate he'd been handed before putting it in the dish rack. "I. No. Sort of?" He sighs. "What I'm reconsidering is my physical ability to do this in the first place."

"You would be far from the first Beta to extend a similar gesture, if that offers any comfort." There had been a hard edge to Hannibal's voice before that is now gone. "Far more often what they are biting is an Omega. There are additional difficulties with an Alpha."

Will jerks his head towards the bag. "Is that what the suspicious duffel is for?"

He's handed another plate. "It is mostly restraints. Instinct is a powerful thing for Alphas and Omegas alike. Regardless of my conscious desires, a bite to the neck will register as a threat and I will try to fight back."

It goes unsaid that if Will had been an Omega, Hannibal's instincts would be telling him the opposite. It's kind of annoying. "Okay, so. The idea is to tie you up, bite you, and then what? Leave you like that until you cool off?"

Only the silverware remains, and they make quick work of it. "The restraints will not hold me forever. Ideally, they will last long enough for you to complete the bite, at which point I will break free and return the favor."

"Um." Will swallows thickly. "Can I…?"

"Be my guest."

Will hands over the towel and walks over to the duffel bag, crouching beside it and unzipping it. He sifts through what he sees on top. There are cuffs, various sizes for various joints, and strips to connect them together. Everything appears to be leather and not metal, and Will realizes with a start that the reasoning there is because Hannibal wouldn't stop trying to break out even if it was straight up impossible, and would likely injure himself in the process.

He picks up a pair of what looks like wrist cuffs. They're connected by a sturdy clip, but that is obviously where the point of failure would be. He doesn't think he could break it no matter

how hard he tries.

Shifting the contents reveals a bottle that he pulls out automatically, high proof alcohol that might not even be legal. “That is not for drinking,” Hannibal calls over his shoulder, like he knew exactly what Will was thinking. It’s probably not very difficult, at the moment. “Use that to clean your mouth.”

Preventing infection is a very unsexy detail, and it’s a toss up on if it’ll actually do anything. Still, every precaution helps. “Meet me upstairs?” Hannibal nods, so Will takes the bottle and leaves the rest of the bag before heading upstairs and shutting himself in the bathroom.

Hannibal will know if he takes a swig anyways. Out of spite, he instead washes his mouth out way more than is strictly necessary, after other preparations are made.

When he heads to his bedroom Hannibal is already there, setting out rolls of bandages and antibacterial pads on a tray on top of the wardrobe. “You think I’m going to have time to bandage the thing before you break out?” Will asks him, eyebrows raised.

“Not particularly.” He places another roll on the tray. “On the off chance that you will, it is prudent to have them nearby. I have more elsewhere in the event that they find themselves used more recreationally.”

Will almost wants to ask what recreational use there could possibly be for a pad of gauze, but he stops himself. “That why there’s nothing sharp over there?”

“You should be able to tear the fabric with your teeth if needed. Now, shall we?”

“Sure.” Will goes for his shirt, but Hannibal’s hand on his wrist stops him. Will jumps. When had the other man gotten so close?

“You should restrain me first. The bag, if you will.”

“Right.” Will grabs the item in question and heaves it up onto the bed. “What am I grabbing out of this?”

“Three sets of cuffs, the ones with multiple connection points. One should be much larger than the other two.”

He can hear Hannibal undressing as he finds the right objects, setting them on the bed. It's not the ones with the clip he saw earlier, instead connected with movable leather straps. There’s still a great deal more hidden inside the bag. “What’s the rest of this?”

“That is all we will need.” So it’s supposed to be a fun surprise, then. He should have figured. Will drops the bag back on the floor and pushes it away with his foot.

When he turns back Hannibal is totally bare to him, and he falters. For all that the focus is on reigning in Hannibal’s instincts, Will is starting to think he could use similar assistance. Something about seeing Hannibal naked, the person beneath the carefully manufactured veneer, it feels… animalistic.

Well, it certainly makes Will feel like an animal, anyways. He blindly reaches for a set of cuffs and approaches Hannibal, who takes them out of his hands and puts them on himself.

The look of disappointment must be obvious on his face because a tiny, satisfied smile materializes on Hannibal's face. "I am open to exploring this in the future but it would not be wise to test my instincts in multiple ways tonight."

"Whatever," Will mutters. He grabs the other two pairs.

"I will need your assistance to bind them together if that makes you feel any better."

It kind of does. They climb on the bed, facing each other, both waiting for the other to make a move. Hannibal is testing him, but he can't figure out how. "Turn around," he eventually says. "I can't bite you from the front."

That seems to have been the correct reaction and Hannibal turns. He walks Will through connecting the ankle bindings and thigh bindings together, then to each other, finally connecting the wrists to the thighs. The position has him forced to kneel and he can't get a lot of leverage to move his limbs, though Will can see the wiggle room in the arms. That's probably where he'll find the force to break out. "You'll want to bite at the base of the neck," Hannibal tells him. "To the side."

Will traces Hannibal's neck with his finger, down and off to the left, pressing into the flesh. "Here?"

It's mostly shoulder where he's at, though the location would still result in a successful mating bite for a more traditional pair. "That will suffice."

The area is a little flat so he runs his finger up, until he'd be mostly biting over the top of the trapezius muscle. "How about here?" It would be easier.

"That as well, though you must listen and stop exactly when I tell you to."

"Of course." Betas don't have the same instinctual awareness of Alphas and Omegas of when to stop biting before you do serious, irreversible damage. That's the main reason it has to be so far from the neck proper. "Do it, Will."

He takes a deep breath, leans forwards, and puts his teeth to Hannibal's flesh.

The second he does so he can feel Hannibal starting to pull against the restraints. "Quickly," Hannibal urges him, and he bites down. It's not enough force, he's not even breaking the skin at this point, how the hell do people do this? "Harder," Hannibal grunts, voice shaky. "Will, you need to bite harder than that. Hurry."

Something about the way Hannibal had said the last word- his voice was fracturing as he lost control, but there had been a pleading edge to it. Will opens his mouth for a moment and then grabs Hannibal's arm to steady him, uses the other to tilt the man's head away, and bites back down as hard as he can.

Almost immediately he can taste blood as it fills his mouth. It isn't enough, he can hear Hannibal telling him to bite harder, so he does, feeling more of the flesh give way beneath his teeth. Blood is dripping down Hannibal's torso now, filling Will's mouth and spilling out the edges, some of it sliding down his throat. It tastes good, which Will distantly realizes is probably a bad thing, since he has no hormones altering the flavor, but still he wants to taste it, bites down harder-

"Stop." The word is firm, echoing as Hannibal uses his Voice, and Will stops. As he lifts his head off Hannibal's shoulder and turns to start to grab the bandages, he hears the sound of sturdy leather tearing.

The world spins and Will finds himself flat on his back on the bed, Hannibal knelt on top, one hand free. His eyes are blazing. With Will pinned in place Hannibal undoes the rest of his restraints and leans down to kiss him, licking his own blood out of his mouth. "Hannibal-" Will tries to say, seeing the way the blood is flowing down his shoulder-

But Will is simply flipped onto his stomach and the collar of his shirt pulled down, exposing the scar of his own mating bite, feels teeth set along the marks they left before, a shudder of pleasure ripping through him as he braces for the pain-

Hannibal bites down gently, barely leaving a mark, his tongue pressing down against his skin, and Will jolts.

This was not what he had been expecting.

Teeth move, to his shoulder as the shirt is pulled down further, a spot close to where Will had bitten Hannibal. He thinks this will be where Hannibal enacts his revenge and he does bite down harder, enough to draw blood and make Will gasp. A tongue laps up the blood as Hannibal puts his body flush against Will's, a faint vibration echoing out into his body.

Is Hannibal fucking purring?

Still keeping him close, Hannibal strips Will's shirt off underneath him and tosses it to the side. Will's still waiting for the teeth to dig in harder, for the moment the pain increases sharply, but it never comes. With Hannibal's arms pinning Will to him he can't do much besides tilt his head away and Hannibal moves his teeth further down his shoulder, biting again, an overlapping circle that draws blood and nothing more. With how sharp the Alpha's teeth are- *is this normal, or just Hannibal?* Will has found himself thinking- he doesn't even need to bite that hard to draw blood. It's gentle, or at least as gentle as someone as inherently violent as Hannibal can be, and throughout it all Will can feel that deep rumble vibrating through his chest. A third bite joins the other two before Hannibal moves back up, fits his teeth to the scar of the mating bite, then sucks the spot, hard. A mark, but not the type either of them had been anticipating.

Hannibal isn't treating him like someone he's warring for dominance with, Will realizes with a jolt. He's treating him like a new mate.

Briefly, as Hannibal pulls off the rest of his clothes, Will considers the possibility that Hannibal is still mostly in control. Ironically, the care with which he's being handled sweeps

that possibility off the table altogether. When Hannibal is lucid he still hurts Will but merely in different ways, things that would be far more dangerous after he's lost control. There are still faint patterns healing on his skin from a scalpel and he knows many more will be painted across him in the future. Besides, Hannibal is frustratingly chatty during sex, and rarely in the way Will enjoys. That's probably the point. A bite is placed on his opposite shoulder and at the same time, Will feels Hannibal rut against him, his cock sliding against the globes of his ass, and his breath hitches.

Before rinsing out his mouth Will had prepped in the bathroom, to an extent. While he's getting used to Hannibal's size it's been a while since they've had sex and the last thing he wants is an injury. He needs to be ready for the likely possibility that Hannibal would go from 0 to balls deep in a single thrust. He hadn't done much; though he doesn't want it to injure him, he still wants it to *burn* . He pushes back against Hannibal, encouraging, feels the head of his cock catch against his rim and tries to push back against it, only for a pair of hands on his back to suddenly push him away, down onto the bed. "Hannibal," Will groans, trying to push himself back upright. "Come on, what are you doing?"

He can hear the tray clatter as Hannibal reaches up just high enough to grab something off of it, then he's being jerked back by the hips so fast that his arms stay where they were, grabbing onto the pillows and stretching above his head. Larger hands pin his wrists and bring them together. Will tilts his head up and watches Hannibal bind his wrists together with the thick bandages. He wraps them thick enough and clips them in place. Will tests the bindings and the bandages give just barely, bending but not enough to let him slip out, almost like they're-

"Wait," Will says. He's looking at elastic bandages, which means Hannibal hadn't been honest about their purpose from the get go. "Fucker," he mutters. Should have looked harder in the first place.

Satisfied that Will won't be fighting him any time soon, Hannibal pulls Will's hips up until he's on his knees, head still down in the sheets. He backs away, leaving Will bereft, but quickly leans back over to follow the curve of his shoulder with more bites, tracing it back down his shoulder blade, peppering bites down his back. Most are barely deep enough to draw blood, some not even weeping more once Hannibal licks it away. Death by a thousand cuts. It's more itchy than painful and Will shifts uncomfortably. If there's a point to this, he hopes Hannibal gets to it soon.

Hannibal keeps biting down, further and further, up over the curve of Will's ass until suddenly, he bites down *much* harder and Will flinches. The pain sends sparks up his spine and he groans again, this time in pleasure. He can feel his own blood dripping down, between his cheeks, and soon another bite is given, then another, and another, on both cheeks. His legs twitch and he bites into the bandages around his wrists, muffling the way his groans are getting sharper, rising in pitch.

Predictably, Hannibal doesn't like that, wrenching Will's head up with a hand buried tight into his curls and a warning growl. He doesn't dare do it again. Hands return to his ass, grabbing and squeezing, making Will hiss with pain as it irritates the bites. Hannibal is

massaging them, drawing more blood with his motions, spreading them apart and then Will feels a hot breath against him, followed by something even hotter- a tongue.

“Oh, fuck,” Will whispers, dropping his head back against the sheets. He’s not trying to muffle anything but he doesn’t think he can keep it together if he watches Hannibal do this, upside-down and between his legs. He rests his forehead there, above his wrists.

This isn’t something they’ve done before, but he’d be lying if he said he was surprised. Maybe by the timing. Hannibal wastes no time burying his tongue inside of Will and it’s *hot,* overwhelming in a way his dick isn’t. The tongue fucks in and out of him, flexible and wet, and the sounds, god the *sounds.* The squelching alone makes his toes curl just because it sounds so fucking filthy. “Holy,” he shudders, voice strained. “Hannibal, *christ.”* He swears he can feel the tongue vibrating inside him as Hannibal, even now, still purrs.

Artificial slick is non-toxic, right?

The fear scatters as he feels thumbs dip inside and stretch him open, wide enough that he can feel his blood trickling in to mix with the lube. The combination can’t taste great, especially not to someone with as keen a sense of taste as Hannibal, something confirmed when the tongue slides out of him and he hears a cough, Hannibal trying to chase the taste away.

“No lube, next time,” Hannibal grumbles, voice thick.

That is a profoundly bad idea and Will cannot *wait* to try it.

It hits him that Hannibal is, to some extent, lucid. “Wait, you’re-” A hand rushes upwards, curls around his mouth to cut him off.

“Quiet,” he is told, and Will nods. The hand holds there for a moment before moving upwards, covering his eyes as Hannibal appears to consider something.

“Do it,” Will urges, and the second roll of bandages is quickly swept off the tray holding them. Hannibal seems to falter, his hands carding through Will’s hair, before he finally winds the fabric around his head, tying it loosely when he’s finished. It’s meant to blind, not secure.

It’s not perfect, but it obscures Will’s vision all the same. With his sight removed Will feels the bites far more keenly, the way blood drips down his body and onto the ruined sheets, the way he can feel Hannibal’s dripping off his own body and falling to mix with Will’s own. He feels the sharp pain of the bites on his ass, the rustling of the sheets as Hannibal moves, the thumbs dipping back into his ass to spread him. The tongue is what he’s expecting but in one fluid movement, Hannibal slams his cock deep inside of Will, making him cry out.

Hannibal immediately sets a brutal pace, fucking Will so hard that he can feel the blood flying off Hannibal’s arm and shoulder hitting his upper back, must even be reaching the back of his head. His arms are crushed uncomfortably underneath him as the force pushes his upper body further and further into the bed. Every thrust is inching him further up the bed and Will can do little else but gasp and moan into the sheets.

The top of his head hits a pillow and Hannibal makes a frustrated noise. The fucking stops and Will is just about to ask why when arms curl around his chest, hauling him upright and burying Hannibal's dick further inside him as he sinks onto his lap with a cry. The Alpha isn't done, rolling back onto his haunches, pulling one arm away just to slide it underneath Will's thighs, lifting them upwards and pinning them in place fully upright. Will's feet don't even touch the bed like this. He's fully bound, both with literal bindings and with how Hannibal has him held in place.

The movement makes Will's world spin since he can't see to orient himself, and he can't help the way his head jerks backwards once everything stops moving, colliding with something hard. It can only be one thing. "Sorry," Will gasps, but all he hears is a soft puff of laughter followed by teeth gently biting an ear. It forces a soft laugh out of him to match. The arm still across his chest turns, sliding between his bound arms and up, fingers curling over his shoulder. Hannibal fucks up into him with a bone-rattling thrust. He's certainly not laughing anymore.

It feels like Hannibal is simply using him for his own pleasure again, a feeling he hasn't had since Hannibal's rut. When more himself Hannibal is intensely, even dangerously interested in Will's reactions and responses to anything that is done to him, so that sort of disconnect is impossible, and he finds he missed it. Though Hannibal is no less brutal on his own it's of a different sort, relishing the sensations he's inflicting on the other man. With the last shreds of humanity ripped off in favor of instinct Will feels reduced to nothing more than a warm hole for Hannibal to rut into, thrusting nonstop with no regard for Will's own comfort or feelings. There is a frightening appeal in it, seeing Hannibal as a wild beast, something Will stumbled onto at the wrong time and is now paying the price for.

He almost laughs, delirious, because in a way, isn't that precisely what happened?

As his moans get more and more breathless the fingers on his shoulder creep towards his neck and Will's entire body clenches down in anticipation. "Please," he begs. The fingers slide away, Hannibal extracting his arms, and Will makes a wounded noise, only for a strong forearm to lay across it and press down. "Yes," he gasps, and the arm tightens and further speech becomes an impossibility.

With the blindfold, the feeling of his breath being restricted further and further makes him panic on instinct, hands trying to jump up and rip the arm away from his throat. Everything, even the relentless motion of Hannibal fucking into him starts to fade as his oxygen is cut off and he can feel his body going limp, pliant. His head lolls to the side and Hannibal cushions it, ensuring his neck isn't jarred by the violent thrusts. Things feel floaty, dreamy, a warmth spreading through his body as the pain and pleasure fade away in turn.

He feels relaxed, comfortable. Hannibal will take care of him. It would be so much easier if he just let Hannibal take care of him, take care of everything. No more arguing with Jack, no more horrific crime scenes to immerse himself in. Everything feels hazy, like a fantasy, and he allows himself to indulge. It's like he's slipping away, and the thought that he might be going somewhere he can't come back from never even crosses his mind. He could drift like this, forever. His hands drop into his lap as he starts to lose consciousness. He'll be safe, here. No more problems.

“Will,” he hears, distantly, then more insistent. “Will. Come back to me.”

The arm lifts off his throat and Will’s entire body tries to buck, held mostly in place, his upper body lurching forwards as he takes a huge gulp of air. His body is twitching and shaking, bearing down on Hannibal who is still fucking into him, but at a much more leisurely pace. He doesn’t even need to ask if he came to know that he did, despite not even feeling it. The way his nerves light up as Hannibal ruts into his oversensitive body is answer enough. He heaves, gasping for breath, and as he does so Hannibal places kisses up and down his neck.

That’s the closest they’ve ever gotten, to- his entire body shudders. “Good, Will,” Hannibal tells him, voice rough. “Very good, my darling.”

The endearment sends a pulse of arousal through Will and he shivers. He never would have pegged himself for being weak to praise, but he supposes there are a lot of things he hadn’t known about himself until he met Hannibal. “I’m fine,” he says, voice raw. It hurts to speak. “I’m okay.”

“Only okay?”

Will sighs, content. “Keep going.”

That purr comes back as Hannibal picks the pace back up, fucking deep and more directed, grinding the underside of his cock against Will’s prostate. His head is still swimming and it’s hard to focus in the post-orgasm haze, particularly with Hannibal still teasing him like this. “Strangle me again,” he asks, before he even realizes the words are coming out of his mouth.

Hannibal’s dick throbs within him, but the answer he gets is not what he wanted. “No, dear. I have already gone overboard as is.”

The fact that he can speak so coherently while in the process of fucking Will means Hannibal has completely regained his senses, unfortunately. “Coward,” Will tries, aiming to rile him back up.

All that earns him is fingers tightening painfully along his jaw in warning. “I would advise you to reconsider your words.”

“Or what?”

The grip tightens further and a moan slips out of Will, giving the game away. The fingers vanish. “You are incorrigible.”

“Must be hard to discipline someone who just enjoys it.”

“I can think of a few things.” Ah. He pushed too hard. The blindfold, loose to begin with, is slid up and off his head. He squints as his eyes adjust to the light once more, wincing as he sees just how much blood is on the bed. His mattress might be as fucked as the sheets. The bandage around his wrists is undone and set off to the side. Hannibal lifts Will up and off of

him, turning him back around and very gently laying him back down on the bed, batting the bandages onto the floor when Will goes for them.

“None of that,” he chastises. Hannibal lifts one of Will’s legs up and hooks it over his uninjured shoulder, sliding back inside of him. He fucks so gently that Will doesn’t even have the satisfaction of Hannibal’s pelvis colliding with the abused and bleeding flesh of his ass.

“Asshole,” Will mutters, and Hannibal gives him a sly grin.

Despite the gentle movements Will still responds to it, heat building within him as Hannibal thrusts inside, a constant, smoldering thing. It wouldn’t be the first time Hannibal’s made him come multiple times in one sitting. That pain of overstimulation is gone and the pleasure just feels aimless, undirected. “I nearly came inside you, earlier.”

“Were you not planning on doing that?” Will speaks slowly, softly, but uninterrupted. He finds his eyes fluttering closed as he lays there, letting Hannibal fuck him.

“I am, but I found myself distracted.”

“By?” Will cracks an eye open. “The way you didn’t bite me back, like you expected?”

“No,” Hannibal tells him. His brow is starting to furrow as he concentrates, having a harder time maintaining those multiple trains of thoughts, a sure sign he’s getting close. “By how easily I could have killed you, and how you would have let me.”

“ *Fuck,”* Will hisses, the comment ripping through him like a lightning bolt. His body bucks upwards and Hannibal takes advantage of that, hauling him up by the arms and back into his lap, this time facing each other. The facade of normalcy drops away as Hannibal reaches down and squeezes Will’s ass, hard, fresh blood dripping through his fingers.

“You won’t be able to work tomorrow,” Hannibal whispers, mouth right beside his ear. “You’ve lost more blood than I intended.”

“Too much?” Will gasps, bracing his hands against Hannibal’s shoulders and pushing back, sitting upright. It hurts, a lot, particularly with how Hannibal is lifting him up and down and putting all his weight on the injuries.

“Doubtful. I will carry out a transfusion if needed.”

Now Will laughs, disbelieving. “Just have blood handy?”

Hannibal fucks him harder, meeting his hands with his own thrusts. “We have the same blood type,” he grunts, eyes closing. “I- mine-”

It comes out more like a growl. Will leans in, puts his hands on Hannibal’s chest, tips his head to the side and smiles. “Come inside me, Hannibal. Knot me.”

He feels the knot swell as semen pours inside him, but he feels it outside, bulging against his rim, and for a moment, Will frowns.

Hannibal presses his hands to Will's shoulders, ignoring the bites, and forces him down and over the swollen knot.

Everything goes white and when it comes back, Will's head is tipped back and his mouth is open. He can hear dogs scrabbling at the door; he had to have screamed. It was so intense he can't even pinpoint the sensation, if it was pain or something else. The lines are thin enough as is. He's not sure if it's even possible for a knot to get bigger over time but it certainly felt larger than anything he's taken before. It keyed him up, pleasure burning inside of him, full to bursting but stagnant as Hannibal fills him. He tries to grind down against the knot with a whine but it's not enough. "Hannibal," he begs, laying his head on the man's shoulder, the bleeding bite mark just beside him. "Please. I'm so close."

Hannibal gathers Will close to his chest, the purr rumbling to life. He runs his hands down the bloody back, traces it down and runs his fingers over the curve of his ass. The fingers pull away, back, and with a sudden forceful movement Hannibal open palm strikes Will, right across the worst of the bites.

"Don't stop," Will cries, and Hannibal hits him again, and again, and then Will is coming for the second time, sinking into Hannibal's chest with a whine.

When his brain adjusts back to the point where he can string together thoughts Will notices Hannibal is nuzzling against him, face buried over the mating bite, that inexplicable purr working overtime. His arms and legs are still shaky, twitching with aftershocks. When he tries to sit back up the arms he hadn't even realized were wrapped around him tighten. "You have to let me go eventually," Will tells him softly.

"Do I?" It's said with a teasing edge but under that all, there's some truth to it, isn't there? Hannibal has him, now, for the rest of his life. "There is time yet." A finger drags down his spine, dipping below to trace where Will is stretched around his swollen knot.

"You didn't bite me," Will reiterates, now that they are more focused. He pauses for a beat. "Well, in the one place we expected."

"I did not." Hannibal nuzzles against him, again.

"Is that weird?"

"I suppose it must be."

It looks like it falls on Will to be concerned, since Hannibal obviously isn't. "You didn't react like you just got bitten by a Beta, Hannibal. You reacted like you had gotten bitten by your mate."

"You are my mate."

And there it is. Will is glad he's had this particular conversation with himself earlier, alone, so he can react correctly now. "I mean, sure, yeah, but biologically? Shouldn't that be impossible?"

Hannibal nips him, clearly pleased Will didn't push back against the prospect of being his mate. "Does it matter, Will?"

"It doesn't matter, but aren't you curious?" The knot is finally going down and he can feel Hannibal shift inside of him, no longer locked in place.

"Not at this exact moment, no." Hannibal finally pulls away. His expression- he looks incredibly, unbelievably *happy,* and the sight of it startles Will. It looks *genuine.*

He laughs, suddenly, brightly. "Guess you have a point."

Hannibal cups his jaw and kisses him for nothing more than the sake of it. "We will need to make extensive use of your bathroom," Hannibal tells him, directly into his mouth.

"Mmm." Will sighs into it. "There are going to be seven dogs stacked right outside my door, just to warn you."

"Can you walk?"

"Not a chance."

Hannibal pulls away, back and out of Will, sending a flood of blood and semen and lube out and onto the bed. Will watches as he walks over, picks up the duffel bag, then back to Will and lifts him up with one arm so easily that Will feels like he's made of matchsticks and driftwood. He shifts Will in his grasp, trying to find the right balance until Will finally says "Here, give me the bag."

It's handed to him and Hannibal settles with one hand under Will's thighs, holding him upright, the other hand holding him steady across his back. Will leans over Hannibal's back, the duffel hanging from his arms, peering inside at the mysterious contents they hadn't even used. The restraints had been right on top so Will hadn't gotten a good look at the rest until now. There are similar restraints, but most of it turns out to be medical supplies, which is a very boring surprise.

"You may come to regret allowing me to do this later," Hannibal tells him, reaching a thumb out to press into Will's upper thighs, towards the bites on his ass.

Will refrains from pointing out the fact that he probably couldn't have stopped Hannibal doing shit. "Doubt it," he says instead, purposefully contrary.

"We shall see."

With that, Hannibal carries Will across the room, parting the sea of worried canines. They make it into the safety of the bathroom to treat each other's wounds.

Hannibal, obviously, was right. Will can't sit on *anything* for at least a week and during that time he tries very very hard not to meet anyone else's eyes.

They had expected him to be bitten again so it's easy enough to hide the huge bruise on his throat underneath bandages he doesn't actually need. That doesn't mean people don't stare when they return to work. When he walks in everyone falls silent for a moment, unsure how to react. "Didn't-" Zeller manages to get out before Price elbows him.

"Welcome back!" Beverly says instead, recovering the quickest of the three. "You guys good?" She shoulders Will and goes to slap Hannibal on the back, something it's remarkable he tolerates in the first place, but she's aiming for the side where the healing bite mark is hidden beneath his clothes and he smoothly steps out of the way. Her hand passes harmlessly through the air as Hannibal adjusts his tie.

She narrows her eyes, turns, and prepares to slap Will on the back instead. Hannibal catches her wrist before it goes anywhere.

"Not a word," Will hisses to her, and she looks *delighted.* "Any progress?"

"None," she informs him cheerfully. "Now come on, it's straw time."

Zeller curses as he pulls the short straw. "This is rigged."

"Don't be ridiculous," Price chides. He had apparently gotten it yesterday since he wasn't one of the three who pulled. "Take your loss like a man."

"I don't want to," Zeller mutters, and Beverly snorts.

"Too bad!" Price turns away from Zeller and towards Will, which was unexpected. "I finished the model last night, pulled some late hours. You two wanna give it a critique?"

"Uh." Will glances towards Hannibal. "Sure?"

Price drags them over to his computer, where a bunch of photos of the corpse are pinned to a bulletin board in roughly the shape of a human. They had clearly put it together as a reference while they were building the model. "Zeller did most of the work but I'm taking credit for it."

"I'm right here."

On cue, the phone rings, and Zeller drags his feet heading over to pick it up. "This it?" Will gestures to the computer, where a program is open and displaying a model of a human body. Judging from the injuries, it must be, and Price nods. He moves the chair aside and Will leans over the table, rotating the model to examine it. It's untextured which makes it a bit difficult to figure out what's going on. "Why am I the one doing this?" He looks over his shoulder, at Hannibal. "You're the artist. You check it out."

"Very well." They trade spaces, Hannibal carefully examining the model and cross-referencing the photos with Will's assistance. They point out a couple of errors and Jimmy notes them down to fix later. "An admirable first attempt." High praise, all things considered.

“Once we locate a 3D printer we can use we can get a little bitty test model before we go for broke. Well, after we do something about file types. I don’t know. Brian is the one who learned all that technical stuff.” Hannibal vacates the spot in front of the computer and Jimmy plops himself down in the chair, wheeling it back into place. “You think an organization like the FBI would have all the cutting edge technology you could ever want but *nooo* we’re apparently not allowed to tie up multiple printers for days to get a life-size corpse. Unbelievable.”

Will is about to say something when Price reaches for the mouse and clearly misjudges the distance, instead knocking it with his hand. The desk is so smooth and pristine that the lack of friction sends the mouse sliding away at a startling pace, colliding with the wall and falling into the gap between the desk and said wall. “Oh for Pete’s sake!” Jimmy huffs. “Cordless mice are so much easier to use.” He’s speaking in a mocking tone, clearly imitating Zeller. “Won’t get tangled up in anything. Sure didn’t get tangled when that happened, did it?”

“Quite a predicament,” Hannibal comments. He leans down to look at the desk from underneath, pausing when he sees the absolute mess of wires from when they had haphazardly set up the computer station. “That may be difficult to retrieve.”

“Hold on,” Will sighs. “Price, can you get out of the way?” The man wheels the chair back and Will moves the monitor and keyboard off to the side, leaning over the desk and testing the space between the desk and the wall. He can get most of his arm down it. “Yeah, I think I can grab it. One sec.” Most of what he feels is cables, none of which the mouse got stuck on, so he needs to go further down. He leans forwards even further, ignoring how the desk cuts painfully into his waist and how the healing wounds on his ass pull, reaching out and straining his arm until he can finally feel it. If he stands up on his toes he can get just enough extra length to grab it after a couple tries. “Got it.” Slowly and carefully, he pulls the mouse back up and sets it back down on the desk, brushing the dust off his arm.

“Thanks!” Jimmy says brightly. “Probably shouldn’t have made you do that while you’re. I’ll try not to do it again!”

Will stretches his arms in front of him, wincing as it pulls at the healing bite marks on his back. It was a strain and nothing more.

“You’ll have to excuse me for a moment,” Hannibal says abruptly, turning on his heel and walking out of the room far more quickly than he normally moves. Will and Jimmy look after him in surprise.

“What was that?”

“Not sure,” Will answers. “I’ll go make sure he’s okay. Maybe he’s allergic to dust or something.” The idea of Hannibal having a weakness so pedestrian as allergies seems ludicrous, but he can’t think of any other explanation.

Beverly is giving him an equally confused look as he follows after Hannibal. There’s no trace of the man but Will has an idea where he may have gone. Near the end of one of the halls on this floor, after seldom used meeting rooms, there’s what was likely an old office, small and private. There are no cameras inside and the door locks. Will had found it quite some time

ago and had used it as an escape whenever a case was getting to him, something that Hannibal had sussed out at astonishing speed. It would make sense for the man himself to go there if he needed a moment.

The thought that he might be intruding never even crossed his mind.

“Hannibal?” he calls out. The door is open, slightly ajar, but the room is dark. Will slips inside and shuts the door behind him, flipping on the lights. “You okay?”

Hannibal looks up from where he had been standing on the far end of the room, eyes flashing red, and his pupils dilate.

“Oh, shit,” Will breathes. Hannibal advances on him and he skirts around the room in the other direction. Once Hannibal reaches the door he stops for a moment to lock it. *Walked into that one,* Will thinks to himself, heartbeat picking up. “Hey, Hannibal. Snap out of it. We’re at work.”

Hannibal tips his head to the side, taking a step forwards, and Will gets ready to continue his circuit around the room. Right as the other man takes a step to the left Will mirrors him, gets ready to run, but Hannibal sharply alters his trajectory and cleanly vaults over the meeting table, quickly cornering Will. “This is great and all, but it’s not the time or place. My mistake for following-”

Before he can finish his sentence Hannibal has backed him against a wall, grabbing him by the thighs and hauling him upwards. Will hisses with pain as hands dig into the healing wounds on his legs and thighs, legs crossing behind Hannibal’s back mostly on instinct, which only makes the situation worse. Hannibal leans in, aiming for Will’s mouth, but he turns his head away before they connect and Hannibal freezes against his jaw, letting out a low growl of warning. He’s irritated, unhappy that Will is refusing him, probably has no idea of where they are at the moment.

“Quantico,” Will says quickly, trying to push Hannibal back and instead only offering up a wrist to get slammed against the wall. “We’re at work, this is Quantico, Hannibal, snap-”

He doesn’t dodge it this time and Hannibal’s lips on his cut his pleas short, consuming the words before they could even be spoken. Will tries to protest, he does, but even he can’t help but respond when Hannibal grinds their hips together, coaxing Will’s tongue into his mouth only to bite down with sharp teeth, drawing blood. For a moment he forgets himself and his head falls back against the wall, groaning into the kiss, hips twitching forward into Hannibal’s movement. The hand pinning his wrist to the wall falls away, presses their chests together to make room as it runs down his back, sliding down underneath his jeans and underwear, fingers probing, and Will remembers where they are.

With his newly freed hand Will grabs Hannibal by the hair and yanks his head backwards. The red in his eyes is intensifying, he’s only becoming less lucid as this goes on, so Will does the only thing he can think of to do- with his other hand, he balls his fingers into a fist and punches Hannibal.

It's not a powerful strike by any means but it makes Hannibal stop moving and for a second, Will thinks it actually may have worked. The hand supporting Will drops him back down to the ground and he stumbles as he tries to get his feet back under him, falling into Hannibal's chest and quickly righting himself. "Hannibal, are you…"

He trails off as he looks up into the other man's face. His eyes still shine red but his face is a mask of perfect calm, wiping away a trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth where it had caught on his teeth as Will had struck him.

Hannibal is *furious.*

"Wait-" is all Will gets out before a hand collides with his throat and slams him against the wall, head hitting painfully against it. The hand squeezes and lifts until Will's feet no longer touch the ground, scrabbling aimlessly for purchase. He tries to say something, anything, but his windpipe is being crushed and he can't get anything out besides a choked off groan. This is different. It feels more dangerous, less controlled. He remembers how Hannibal had said he'd rather avoid breath play in the future while he's in rut, lest he lose control. He looks into Hannibal's eyes now and sees only cold, impersonal anger.

He has to get out. His heartbeat picks up and he tries to kick out, make Hannibal drop him, but he's already starting to fade and the limb kicks out so weakly it never even makes contact. Will has no idea when his hands got up here but he's trying to pry Hannibal's hand away from his throat, unable to budge the iron grip. Despite his trust he genuinely thinks Hannibal, blinded with rage, is going to kill him.

As his vision starts to darken he feels the heel of Hannibal's palm press against his cock where he's rock hard in his jeans. Will doesn't have the brain power left to be furious with himself for being so fucking turned on when he should be fighting for his life. His mouth opens, trying to gasp for air, even the tiniest bit, anything to get his strength back and break free. Hannibal watches him, gaze sharp, and tightens his hand around Will's throat.

Everything goes dark.

Light comes back with blinding force at the same time a sharp pain rips through him. Will's body seizes, lurches forwards as he takes in huge gulps of air. He's seated, on the floor, and has no memory of falling there in the first place. Had he lost consciousness? His upper body tips to the side, hands catching himself before he falls completely to the ground.

There is come cooling inside of his underwear, but he can be angry at himself later. A hand grips him by an upper arm with bruising force and he's being thrown against a table, bent over it, Hannibal pinning him in place. "Stop," Will croaks, voice cracking. "Hannibal, please. You have to stop."

"Will," Hannibal growls, voice thick with arousal, but it's still a word. That's progress.

"We can't- not here," Will begs him. "Please. You're going to regret this later."

The answer is another growl, and Will grits his teeth and tries to think. He has to find a way to get Hannibal off him, to make him come back to his senses. He has no idea what triggered

this but it's obviously not an actual rut. He tries to elbow Hannibal, who easily catches his arm. Fighting the man off won't work. Another hand is at his belt, trying to take off his pants, and Will takes a deep breath and does something he would have laughed hysterically at the prospect of just ten minutes earlier.

He tries to appeal to Hannibal's caring side.

"Alpha," Will keens, pitching his voice up. "Please, not like this. *Mate."*

The hand at his belt stills and he can scarcely believe it when the weight lifts off his back. He can't let this chance slip away so he turns himself around and smiles as sweetly as he can muster, cupping Hannibal's jaw and bringing him down for a kiss. "Thank you, Alpha," he sighs, relief coursing through him. It's not over yet, but Hannibal has stopped actively attacking him and is watching him with interest. Will trails a hand down Hannibal's waist, around his hip, grabbing him through his suit pants. "Please, not here. I'll take care of you and we can save the rest for when we're home."

As expected, the mention of a shared home between them hooks Hannibal and his chest rumbles with the echo of a purr. "Good, Alpha," Will whispers, deftly undoing the catch on Hannibal's pants and tracing the bulge in his underwear. "You're so good to me." He glances down. If Hannibal doesn't snap out of it after coming, they're probably fucked. Literally. He pulls Hannibal out of his underwear and strokes his dick, mouth watering at the sight and feel of it heavy in his hand.

No. They're already going to have a hell of a time hiding what they did in here from their coworkers, and if Will drops to his knees and sucks Hannibal off in the spare room they won't have a snowball's chance in hell. He diverts his eyes, looks back up at Hannibal's face instead, jerking him off going off his touch and nothing else.

Will smiles again, pulling Hannibal closer with his other hand, putting lips to his ear. "There," he murmurs. "See?" This is not remotely the kind of dirty talk Will normally engages in and he has no idea what to say, just following what feels right. "I've never seen anything as impressive as this before. And it's all mine now, isn't it?" He can feel the rumble returning and Hannibal's dick twitch in his hand as he strokes it lazily. "I'm the only one who gets to enjoy this." He's veering to close back into dangerous territory, so he tries to go somewhere else. "Your teeth, too. Every time I take a step I feel the sting you left me. Did you know that?"

Hannibal hands find their way to his ass, which is dangerous, but he allows it for the time being, relishing the way it hurts when he squeezes. He exaggerates a moan. "Yes, just like that, Alpha. No one else has ever hurt me like you do." He feels something wet against his wrist, precum, and he pulls his hand up, runs his thumb over the slit, plays with Hannibal's foreskin. "You like it too, don't you? Hurting me."

A growl, and Hannibal abruptly bites down into his shoulder, over his shirt. Will lets out a breathy laugh, kissing Hannibal's neck. With Hannibal's head locked in place he brings both hands down to his cock, one moving lower with a gentle squeeze. Even the man's balls feel massive in his hand. He massages them, jerking him off quicker and quicker when he feels

the teeth loosen and hears his breathing pick up. “So perfect for me,” Will sighs. “The perfect mate.”

The hands on his ass tighten so abruptly that they nearly pull him off the table. “Easy there,” Will chides. “Don’t reopen the wounds, not when you can’t see them.” He feels Hannibal’s balls tighten, pull up, and he quickly pulls that hand upwards to try and roll up his sleeve and then Hannibal is coming with a quiet noise, hands releasing Will and landing on the table to steady himself.

Will holds his breath for a moment, releasing it when he’s not immediately slammed flat onto the table. He lets go of Hannibal’s softening cock, tucking it back inside his underwear, trying not to wipe the semen everywhere. It’s coating his forearm, an astonishing amount, and he had just barely moved his sleeve out of the way in time. “You back?”

Hannibal pulls away, the red faded out of his eyes. He looks, of all things, irritated. “You should not have followed me.”

“Do *not* try to make this my fault. What the hell happened?”

“I-” Uncharacteristically, Hannibal stops himself. His eyes fall to the semen on Will’s hand and arm and quickly move elsewhere. “No, you are correct. If anyone is at fault here it would be me.”

Still not actually admitting any fault, which means he’s back to normal. “That scared the hell out of me. What happened?” Speaking normally now, Will winces when he hears how hoarse his voice sounds. It’s getting better, at least.

Now, Hannibal looks the closest he could ever get to ashamed. “You bent over.”

Will sits on the table, blinks, and then brings his clean hand to his temples. “Seriously? Is this just going to be what things are like, now?”

“Not forever.” Hannibal rights his clothes with a rare sigh. “So soon after we mated, it triggered my instincts. It should get better over time.”

Before he can respond, Hannibal’s hand fits around his neck, and Will flinches.

“These bandages need to be fixed.”

“Do they hide the new bruise?”

“They will. Wait here, Will. I will be back with everything we need.”

“Hannibal, if you come back in here with lube I swear to-”

“To clean up.” Satisfied he is put together, Hannibal leaves the room, closing the door behind him without even a goodbye.

Once he’s gone Will lets out a breath he hadn’t even realized he’d been holding. He holds both hands up in front of his face and tries to stop them shaking.

He really, really has no idea why the fuck he thought Hannibal's control had been something he could rely on. Not after how this all started. Today could have had a very different ending for them.

He should be worried about how much that possibility thrills him.

Hannibal is back in less than ten minutes with a small medical bag in hand. "You just have that handy?" Will asks lightly, trying to hide how rattled he is.

There is a moment where Hannibal just looks at him and he knows he's already been found out. "In the car," is all he says. "One must always be prepared."

The first thing he hands Will is a package of wet wipes and a pair of clean underwear, Will's size. Of course he has that with him at all times. While Hannibal pulls out fresh bandages Will cleans his hand, himself, and swaps into the clean pair of underwear. Hannibal holds out a hand for the dirty ones and as he's handing them over, Will realizes he's not going to be getting those back. "How's it look?" he asks, as Hannibal unwinds the bandages from around his neck.

"Would you like to see?"

He would, but. "I don't think that's a good idea right now."

"Why? You handled me so well earlier."

The corner of Will's mouth twitches up. "That's considered 'well'? Forgive me for not wanting to test that further. At least not here."

Hannibal puts the gauze in place over the already healed mating bite, taking a moment to trace the outline of the new bruise before winding the bandages around it. "Your Voice would be redundant, if you had one."

"Don't be so dramatic," Will huffs. "I know you're not fooled by any of it."

"It does not need to fool me to be effective." He pins the bandages in place. "Arguably, it may be more so."

"Good to know." It somehow still winds back to a power play, Hannibal liking it when Will plays the part of a sweet, subservient Omega. Willingly submitting. Even when he uses it to his advantage, Hannibal just likes seeing him be manipulative. It's starting to seem like the only thing he could do to Hannibal that the man would not enjoy would be rejecting him.

Well, that's not going to happen anytime soon.

"Does it ever bother you?" he asks before he can stop himself. Hannibal waits for him to continue, knowing Will wouldn't be foolish enough to ask if something Hannibal just openly admitted to enjoying bothered him. "I don't have a Voice. We're never going to have the same bond an Alpha and Omega would have."

"It does not," Hanniba replies, no hesitation. "Does it bother you?"

Will shrugs. “I just know it can be a point of strain later down the line.”

“If the strength of our bond worries you, we could always get married.”

Both of them fall silent, and Will’s brain joins them. Hannibal doesn’t look like he’s chomping at the bit to exchange vows but Will knows without a doubt if he said he wanted to, they’d be legally married before the day ended. “That is not remotely what I was trying to say.”

“Pity.” Hannibal packs everything back into the bag. “I ran into Ms. Katz in the hall. She seemed worried.”

“And?” Will hops down from the table. It’s still a bit hoarse, but it’s difficult to hear the strain in his voice anymore.

“I told her you fell and reopened your wound.”

“Oh, who’s not too good for the old ‘fell down the stairs’ excuse now?”

“Will.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Will mutters. He’s prickly, more so than normal. Rather than encouraging it, Hannibal backs down for once, no scathing reply welcoming him with open arms. All he gets is a flat look. “Sorry. Let’s go back.”

“The lock on this room is quite effective,” Hannibal comments.

“No.”

Hannibal does not bring it up again.

Work crawls by. A couple days later, Will’s luck finally runs out.

Will pulls out the shortest straw with a groan, but everyone is surprised when Hannibal pulls it back out of his hand. Since Hannibal doesn’t *technically* work directly for them, he’s on as a consultant and Jack’s been working on getting him to special investigator, they had left him out of the phone schemes. “Will would be far more useful to you than me,” he tells them.

“Jack offered his team to man the phones,” Will points out. “You have no obligation to do it.”

“Perhaps I have an obligation of a different sort.”

Will frowns, considering, and he can hear the way Beverly inhales sharply beside him. In the end, he shrugs. “Your funeral.”

He's quickly dragged by Beverly over to her corner of the room once Hannibal is almost immediately captured by a call. Will kind of wants to see how Hannibal handles the tip line, he gets the feeling it'd be pretty amusing, but he can't really admit that out loud. "Dude," she hisses to him. "Okay, sit down."

"No," Will refuses, leaning up against the wall instead. There's no way to avoid making contact with the wall at all and he winces as his ass connects with it. He'd been expecting this since they came back to work, but Hannnibal had been stuck so closely to him that his coworker hadn't had the chance to pry him away until now. "You know he can probably hear us, right?"

She stares at him. "He *definitely* knows what happened, so why would I care?"

A sentiment Hannibal would be proud of. Maybe he's rubbing off on all of them. "We're not talking about this."

"You can't just pretend nothing happened!"

Unfortunately, she is right. "Okay, so why do we need to talk about it?"

"Because this came out of nowhere?" Jack might be rubbing off on them as well. "I thought Hannibal was hard to read, but it was pretty obvious that he was in love with you."

"Was I *really* the only one who didn't know?"

"I never would have guessed that it went both ways."

Will brings a hand to his face and rubs at his temples. He is not ready to have this conversation, not with anyone. "Why is everyone so fucking focused on that?" he mutters, with more heat than he intended.

"Woah," Beverly says, throwing her hands up. "Hit a nerve?"

"No." Did she? "Yes. Maybe."

"Okay so we'll just… sidestep that one. Are you guys really…?"

"Do you think this is some elaborate ruse?"

"I don't know! You both do weird stuff!"

Unfortunately on point. "Yes, it's for real." He crosses his arms. "Beverly, did you actually need me for anything or was this all just a pretense?"

"No, wait." She sits back up, pulling folders out of the huge pile she has on the table. "I had real work too. Something's been bothering me."

Will flips the folders open and lines them up. Three, one for each victim. "Looking at the victims again?"

“Are these really the only three?”

“Hmm.” He looks between the photos of the victims, when they had been alive and well. “The drastic escalation.”

She nods. “It feels like we’re looking at a puzzle with some of the pieces missing.”

Will flips through the papers in the folders until they’re all on photos of the corpses. The first body was almost wholly intact and had been suffocated, likely with a pillow. Considering it had been the first, there is a high chance they were killed by mistake, and the killer had planned on things working with them and them alone. The second is riddled with stab wounds, likely killed spur of the moment. The third, however, was strangled, and the mutilation done post mortem. “We’re still thinking the first was an accident, the second was killed in the moment, and the third was deliberate, right?”

“Yeah. I still agree with that, but you don’t go from this-” she points to the first victim- “-to this with only one in between.” She ends tapping on the third victim.

It hadn’t sat well with Will either. “I don’t think there’s any room for more victims in between what we have, considering his modus operandi. All of them had been confined for weeks before resurfacing dead. If he’s trying to bond with them, having more than one at a time defeats the purpose.” Will leans back against the wall and closes his eyes, going over everything in his head, trying to snap together the edges of thoughts and theories. Are they coming at this the wrong way? He’s discarding them because his bites are failing. It’s common knowledge that a bite can only succeed if both parties are very aware and willing, consenting to be mated.

But common knowledge is often wrong, or oversimplified. If that was an objective truth, how had he mated with Hannibal on what could arguably be described as a whim? He opens his eyes. “Is it *really* true that a mating bite cannot be forced under any circumstances?”

“Reality is never that simple.” Beverly gasps and Will jolts at the sound of Hannibal’s voice. It seems he had finished the call. “It cannot be forced in the purely physical sense, as either party rejecting it will cause the bite to fail. That does not mean one cannot be coerced or otherwise driven into a corner where they have no choice but to accept the bite.”

“That’s why there’s the sharp escalation,” Will thinks aloud. “All three victims chose, literally, to die rather than be mated with him.”

“It need not be that dramatic,” Hannibal interjects. “The mind is a powerful thing. Even if they realized that was their only chance at survival, they may have been exposed to such great trauma that they could not stop themselves from rejecting.”

“But he wouldn’t see it that way,” Beverly extrapolates, and Hannibal nods. “All he’d see is the rejection.”

“Eventually he’ll strike the right balance,” Will says. “Toe the line between making them afraid for their lives if they reject him but still able to consciously accept. But then what? He keeps them in captivity for the rest of their lives?”

“I do not think our killer is thinking that far ahead,” Hannibal gently suggests. “There remains yet another possibility. Though it is exceedingly rare, it is possible for an Alpha to be born lacking the ability to bond altogether.”

“Really?” Will looks up, surprised. He had always taken for granted that it was just something everyone could do.

“A tragic condition. I do believe that your first hypothesis is far more likely to be true.”

“Okay, this is.” Will frowns. “Does this actually help us?”

“If the second thing he said ends up being what’s going on, it narrows down the field of suspects by a huge margin.” Beverly sighs. None of them are expecting this to be that easy.

“It will help narrow down your killer profiles.” The phone rings, and Hannibal glances back towards it. “You will have to excuse me.”

Beverly watches him go, waiting until he’s seated and on the phone before speaking. “He really jumped to take that bullet for you, huh?”

“Can it. The killer clearly does not realize what’s happening, if he keeps doing the same thing over and over. Arrogant, unable to accept that something he’s planned might be inherently flawed. Rash. Prone to extreme emotions when stressed. Wait here.”

“Wait here?” Beverly repeats, voice fading as Will strolls across the room, opening a filing cabinet and pulling stacks of files out. He balances them precariously in his arms and he hauls them back to the table. “Dude, what the hell are those?” Beverly asks, closing and stacking the victim profiles off to the side.

“Possible killer profiles,” Will announces, dropping the stack on the table with a resounding *thump*. “We should be able to eliminate quite a few.”

“Oh my god,” she mutters. “Pass some over.”

He does so. “Didn’t really have much else to work on.”

“Seriously? Ice cream salesman, may have driven the truck by all their residences as a cover to investigate?”

Will winces. “Had to explore every possibility.”

She gives him a flat look but doesn’t complain further. “Hey,” she does say. “You’re happy, right?”

“Happy?” He thinks. “Yeah, I think so.”

That makes Beverly laugh. “Close enough.”

“Not worried about his happiness?”

“Dude, he has an infinite amount of money and influence to fall back on. You have seven dogs and alcohol.”

“This conversation is making me less happy.”

“Oops. As long as you're happy.”

It’s a simple statement, but a powerful one.

As long as he’s happy. If she could see the marks of what makes him happy, would she still be singing the same song?

After Hannibal’s little stunt, Will cuts whatever this is off at the head by insisting he simply be added to the pool if he’s planning on helping them with it. It’s not fair for only Will to have a permanent excuse to avoid phone duty, after all.

Though he was not with them every day it had already been normal for Hannibal to spend the most time with Will, even before any of this had happened. They had always gotten along well enough despite frequent disagreements and their natural talents complimented each other. Somehow, he *still* managed to find a way to increase their time together, until it was at the point where Will did not go anywhere without Hannibal at his side, unless Hannibal was glued to the phone. It could not be more obvious what was going on between them so Will finally just outright told everyone that they were mated, something that made Hannibal purr for just long enough to make everyone turn and look at him with wide eyes.

Less benignly, a scant two weeks after he’d bitten Hannibal, the fever returns. Will walks into work with a splitting headache, wincing at the lights, Hannibal making a beeline for him with a carefully manufactured air of concern. “You do not look well.”

“That makes sense because I sure don’t feel well either,” Will grumbles. A hand presses against his forehead.

“You have a fever, but it’s mild.”

“I’m fine.”

“Are you certain?”

“Yeah, I.” Will had been making progress trying to feel out the killer’s profile, and he didn’t want to stop here. “I’m fine. Can’t keep missing work anyways.”

“Very well.” Hannibal steps back, gaze calculating, and a twinge of worry goes through Will. Again, Hannibal noticed something. Maybe there’s something deeper than the flu wrong with Will.

He can’t dwell on it. Hannibal won’t let anything drastic happen to him. He may suffer, but he’ll survive.

Hannibal ends up on the phones which is fine with Will, since he’s finding it hard to focus even with just himself. It’s hard to grasp the shape of the killer when even the room around

him seems to waver every time he moves his head. Despite his words, he makes very little progress.

Then Hannibal stands before him, a slip of paper in his hands. “Come. We must speak to Jack.”

At first he thinks he’s being sent home sick but the paper… “An actual lead?”

“In a way.”

Will’s first instinct is that Hannibal just wants Will with him in the general sense, but when he hands Jack the paper in his office and his boss’s brow furrows, a sinking feeling kicks in. “No,” Jack says, firm.

“No what?” Will holds out his hand for the paper and Jack folds it neatly, setting it on his desk. “Oh. Let me guess. Mr Smith miraculously remembered something vital and wants to tell me directly.”

“I told you I wouldn’t make you speak to him again. It’s already suspicious that he called the tip line instead of contacting us directly.”

“He hoped to get you on the phone.” Hannibal, beneath the placid calm, seems angry. “I find myself agreeing with Jack, here.”

“Hold on.” Will closes his eyes, rubbing at his forehead, thinking. His thoughts always come much slower with a fever.

“Will, are you not feeling well again?” Jack asks.

“I’m fine.” He opens his eyes. “Let me go, and I’ll take Hannibal. Might scare him off for good. Besides, he may have genuinely withheld something for this purpose.”

Jack considers that. “Could you…” He points to his own neck.

Since he’s supposed to be injured there, he looks up at Hannibal, like he’s asking the doctor for advice. He sort of is, anyways, since the bandages have been hiding the bruising. “There may still be some bruising from when I held him in place, but the bite itself should be healed by now. It was not as severe as before.”

Hearing Hannibal calmly discussing something like this with their boss makes a fresh wave of nausea roll through Will. “I see. Will, if you’re comfortable with that, it may drive the point home.”

At least it seems that Jack is starting to trust Hannibal again. He didn’t even flinch when Hannibal told him he’d held Will tightly enough by the throat to cause extensive bruising. “Sure.”

Jack checks his watch. “You guys can head out for the day right after. Just call to let me know what he tells you.”

“I’m fine,” Will tries to say again, but he knows it’s fruitless. Even before whatever this is started Will would start to deteriorate the longer a case stagnated, all those dark thoughts pinging around his head with nowhere to go. This case was different since it had been kicked up to them and they haven’t actually been to a crime scene yet, but the general principle remained, and the frustration with it.

Hannibal’s hand on his shoulder steers him away and out of Jack’s office. “We shall take you up on that, Jack. Thank you.”

“Remember what I’ve told you before, Will.”

He looks back over his shoulder at Jack. “Let Hannibal be the one to hit them because he doesn’t technically work for the FBI?”

Even from this angle, it’s easy to see the unimpressed look Jack gives him. “If you’re uncomfortable, you can leave and have someone else finish the interview later.”

“It would be better to hit them off the clock regardless,” Hannibal adds, taking them out of the room before Jack has a chance to respond.

They take Hannibal’s car, as always. It’s mostly because Hannibal doesn’t want to be seen in Will’s piece of shit, or at least that’s the conclusion he’s come to. When they pull up outside the home of the witness Hannibal stops Will exiting with a hand on his arm. He leans over and starts undoing the bandages.

“Right,” Will murmurs. “Forgot already.”

“You’re sick again.” It’s not a question.

“I’ve been healing a lot.”

“And how is that going?”

“Well, it’s happening.” The bites on his back have healed and the ones on his inner thighs are close, but everything on his ass and further down are taking longer, since they keep getting irritated when he sits down. “How’s the throat look?”

Judging by how Hannibal traces the outline of the most recent bruise, it’s still visible. His fingers drag around to the back of Will’s neck, brushing over the mating bite, and Hannibal presses down hard enough to make Will wince. “Visible, but nearly healed.”

“Great. Let’s get this over with.”

They approach the house and Will knocks on the door. The witness opens it so quickly he has to have been actively waiting for them. His eyes light up when he sees Will but quickly dim when he notices Hannibal. “I only asked to speak to Will.”

Not even trying to hide his intentions, then. Will sighs. “I don’t know what impression you seem to be under, but law enforcement is never going to send a single agent out to your house to interview you. Ever.”

James looks at Hannibal, notices how he's standing- close to Will, not so close as to be inappropriate but undeniably far closer than a simple coworker would be- and something dark flashes through his eyes. "I'm not sure I feel comfortable-"

Hannibal, in a rare show of impatience, interrupts him. "The only way you will be speaking to a single agent, alone, is if you come with us to Quantico to have everything filmed in an interrogation room."

If Hannibal's the stick, Will can be the carrot. "I'm not really sure why you seem to trust me," Will lies. "I can promise you that if you trust me, you can trust Dr Lecter."

The man in question takes that as a sign to put his hand on Will's shoulder, hammering the point of their closeness home. It's barely there, just a flash, but James looks *pissed.* The emotion is quickly buried, smoothed over with manufactured nervousness.

The hand on his shoulder tightens. Hannibal saw it too.

"Okay," the witness finally sighs. "Okay, I'll trust that. Sorry. I just." He speaks as if he's hesitating, anxious. "I don't want anyone to think I was hiding this. I genuinely just forgot."

"Of course," Will soothes. "It happens. We understand."

He nods and steps aside, clearly inviting them in. The house wasn't exactly messy before but it has obviously been cleaned further, and Will fights the urge to roll his eyes. They're led into the same living room as before. "So what was it you remembered?" Will asks as he's sitting down, not giving the man time to offer them anything. He pulls out a pen and notepad as Hannibal sits beside him, again closer than coworkers.

Their witness looks put off by the abruptness. "When I was headed towards where I found the- the body, I just remembered that when I was a couple blocks away, someone passed me headed the opposite direction."

Will and Hannibal exchange a look. Someone leaving a murder scene is not generally the sort of thing you forget to tell law enforcement. "Can you describe them for me?"

"Yeah." James looks down at the floor. "Um. Maybe about five eight, five nine? They were wearing a grey hoodie and sweatpants, so I didn't get a good look at their face. I'm sorry for not bringing it up sooner. The body shocked me so badly, that entire morning is just kind of a blur."

They can't disprove the statement about shock because there is every possibility it is true. Despite that, they got lucky and a shop in the direction this mystery suspect supposedly fled in had security cameras pointed out into the street, and they had already exhaustively reviewed the footage. If someone had been heading that way like James claims, they would have been caught on camera, and no such person had ever been seen. "I see. Can you tell me anything else about them?"

No, as it turns out. The witness wastes their time with apologies and pointless info that Will all dutifully notes down, ignoring the raging headache that's only increasing in size. As he

writes the words are starting to fuzz, the world blending together, and he can feel the fever intensifying. Will is about to respond with another meaningless platitude when Hannibal speaks up instead. “It sounds like you’ve given us everything you can. We appreciate you contacting us with this new information. Will?”

Will blinks, slow. Have they? “Um, yeah, you’re right. Thank you for your time, Mr Smith.”

“If you have any further information, please contact us directly next time instead of through the tip line.”

“I misplaced the business card,” the man begins, only to be cut off once again.

“No matter.” Hannibal extracts something from inside his suit pocket- one of Jack’s cards. Always prepared for any circumstance. “Here you are. We’ll be taking our leave now.”

“I-” James frowns. “Okay. Thank you.”

Will is expecting to be herded out the door with Hannibal at his back, only to find Hannibal leading, and he realizes it’s to make sure the witness sees Will’s mating bite. Of course. At least the man has enough self-awareness not to slam the door behind them.

“You were short with him,” Will points out.

“Did you not want me to be?”

“No.” He shakes his head slowly. “Just kind of surprising, considering your usual restraint.”

Hannibal looks at him. “Will, come here.”

“What?” He takes a step back automatically. “Why?”

A hand snakes out and grabs him hard by the wrist, jerking him forwards, and Will’s heart rate picks up for a moment until Hannibal simply presses his other hand to his forehead. “As I thought. Your fever is climbing.”

“I’m-” Will cuts himself off. “Yeah. I think it is.”

“Come. In the car. I will take you home and we will figure out the rest from there.” Hannibal releases him and opens the car door, standing there, refusing to budge until Will gets in.

They’re both stubborn, but Will has long since learned he won’t win any wars of attrition against Hannibal. He gets in the car.

While they’re driving back, Will calls Jack and updates him. Jack is just as suspicious as he is of the ‘new’ information. “We never saw a second person on the cameras.”

“I know. It’s probably just a lie.”

“Great.” He hears a huge sigh on the other end of the phone. “We’ll take a closer look at the footage, see if it’s possible anything was tampered with. How are you feeling?”

“Um,” Will replies.

“Just let me know if you’re too sick to come in tomorrow,” Jack replies, flat, and ends the call.

With a tired sigh, Will leans back into the seat, rubbing his temples. “Why does this keep happening?” he mutters.

He feels more than sees Hannibal glance over at him. “What do you mean?”

“All this,” he replies, unhelpfully.

Hannibal gets it anyway. “You have been sick quite a lot recently. This is the time of year for illness to run rampant, and you have been healing from injury nearly nonstop since my rut.”

“I hate it.”

“Hm.” Fingers tap on the steering wheel, once, twice. “We may have to use more caution regarding our activities.”

But he doesn’t like that either. He knows Hannibal doesn’t, but Hannibal is the type of person who can put practicality above all else. Most of the time, anyway. “Is there a second option?”

“I suppose if you resigned from your job and no longer worked, it would not be an issue.”

Will groans and turns in his seat, away from Hannibal. “So no, there isn’t.”

“Once my instincts settle, I should be able to reign myself in to a much greater degree. It seems I may need to exercise restraint for the both of us.”

“Maybe I’ll settle down too.” The words sound hollow, even to him.

“I think not. Autassassinophilia is, inherently, a very extreme paraphilia.”

“Auta-” Will scrunches his eyes shut, thinking. He’s not anywhere near his best right now and not in the state to work out the meaning of a word through its etymological roots. It has to be related to death, so he has a hunch.

“Sexual arousal due to the risk of being killed.”

That shocks through Will, sending heat zipping up his spine. Does he really- “And here I thought I just liked being choked.” His voice sounds hoarse. Deep down, he can tell that Hannibal hit the nail on the head.

“Those often go hand in hand. We are almost home.”

Calling it ‘home’, like it’s both of theirs. He had been desperate, but he clearly started something that day, back in the storeroom. At least he is actually being taken to his house in Wolf Trap based on the scenery he sees out the window.

When they arrive Will stumbles out of the car, off balance. He catches himself before Hannibal has a chance to sprint around the car and do it himself. “Damn,” he hisses, keeping his eyes down. The sun feels bright and blinding, reflecting off the snow on the ground-

It hasn’t snowed yet. Will blinks, and the snow vanishes back into dirt and leaves.

“Will,” he hears called out, and suddenly there is an arm around his shoulder. “What is it?”

“I’m-” he clenches his jaw, sucks in a quick burst of air. “Hallucinating again.”

He closes his eyes and feels Hannibal lean in, inhaling deeply, scenting him. “I still sense nothing beyond a severe case of the flu, though if you are hallucinating your fever must be quite high. Come inside, Will.”

Hannibal helps him in, depositing him on a couch which Will immediately stands up from the second Hannibal’s back is turned. The dogs are thronging around him, wet noses and lolling tongues, and he has to feed them. He’s stumbled into the kitchen by the time Hannibal reenters the house- when had he left?- and he’s promptly picked up around the waist and carried back to the couch. “I will see to the dogs. You must rest.”

“But you hate the dogs.”

Hannibal pauses. “I do not hate your pets.”

“Most of them.” The dogs are circling Hannibal now, save for Winston, who is nosing at Will and whining with vague concern. “You hate the stupid ones and Buster, because he’s smart in an annoying way.”

“They are important to you.”

“Damn right they are.” His hand find’s Winston’s head, petting him. “You’ve probably moved past the killing animals stage a long time ago, anyways.”

This fever, quite literally, is going to be the death of him.

Hannibal has gone perfectly stock still, eyes so perilously blank that only then Will realizes what he had just said. “I have never killed animals out of anything other than necessity,” Hannibal says, voice so perfectly modulated and even that it sounds inhuman.

Even Will has enough self-preservation instincts left to swallow down the reply of *so you just started with people, then?* “Uh-huh. Food is in the cabinet on the upper left.”

That seems to snap Hannibal out of it but Will doesn’t think for a second that there aren’t hundreds of trains of thought screaming through that head of his. Hannibal simply nods, opens the cabinet, and gets to work.

While Hannibal is feeding his dogs Will leans back on the couch, closing his eyes, trying to force the world to stop spinning around him. Maybe literally too if he tries hard enough. He’s known, in a way, ever since the rut. Hannibal is not a normal person. Everything he knows, everything he’s helped them with, all that information had always seemed oddly direct.

Everyone just assumed he was an expert, not that he was speaking from personal experience. That uncomfortable possibility has always sat low in his gut, voiceless but persistent. At the very least he knows Hannibal has the disposition to be a killer. Still, it's another thing entirely to find that fear all but confirmed.

He wonders about their unsolved cases. Were any of them Hannibal's?

The most terrifying thing about this realization is how it doesn't even ripple how he feels about Hannibal. It's more like a puzzle where the last piece just clicked into place. Satisfying.

He opens his eyes when he hears the sound of the front door as Hannibal lets the dogs out to do their business. "Fuck me," he asks the Alpha, point blank.

Hannibal closes the door and steps back, turning as he goes. "That would be unwise while you are ill."

"Worried about catching it?"

"It is not contagious," Hannibal tells him, which is a hell of a slip up considering he's supposed to have the flu. Seems like the man is a bit distracted at the moment. "It will worsen your sickness.

"Don't care." The need feels so urgent all of a sudden, like he *needs* to tie Hannibal back to him, assure him that everything is okay. That he's not a threat.

Hannibal regards him for a moment before moving closer, finally standing before him. One hand curls around his jaw, wrenches his mouth open, and a thumb presses down on his tongue. "Perhaps there is something else we can do, instead."

And that goes straight to Will's cock. The thumb pulls away and Will swallows thickly. "I've sucked you off before."

"You have," Hannibal agrees, his hand slowly moving down, to Will's neck. "You are quite good at it too. I was thinking of something different." His fingers gently squeeze around Will's neck and his pulse quickens. "This will not be something we can do often, going forwards. Jack will not accept it if you suddenly acquire a taste for turtlenecks."

As much as he hates it, Hannibal is right. "And?" he prompts.

"I think that you could take my knot here."

Again, Will swallows, and he can already feel himself getting hard in his pants. Everything feels warmer than usual. "Yes," he gasps. "Yes. I can. *Please.* "

Hannibal looks down at him, pleased, and steps away. "Wait upstairs. I will join you when I'm finished here."

With a shaky nod, Will stands, Hannibal's hands twitching towards him when he seems unsteady. He makes it up the stairs under his own power. Instead of his bedroom he heads to the bathroom, turning on the tap and splashing water on his face.

When he looks back up at his reflection his face is flushed and he can't tell what moisture is from the tap and what's from sweat. Something has to be wrong with him, something far more complex than a simple flu. His hands tighten on the sink.

Looking in the mirror, he opens his mouth, wide. There's no way the knot will fit through his lips and jaw, especially not when Hannibal's cock on its own is almost too much for him to handle. If something goes wrong Hannibal would have to dislocate his jaw to pull the knot out, maybe knock out some teeth.

His legs nearly buckle right there, at the thought. They weren't exactly steady to begin with. Downstairs he hears Hannibal letting the dogs back in and he wipes his face dry. It won't be much longer until he comes upstairs, and then-

Will's head throbs and he closes his eyes until the vertigo passes.

He goes into the bedroom before Hannibal can start heading up the stairs, sitting down on the bed and closing his eyes. It feels like his head is throbbing, pulsing with the force of a headache. Deep breaths, in and out, trying to calm his racing nerves.

He's not frightened. He's too excited. He knows that if this is going to work he's going to need to remain calm, as relaxed as possible so his throat doesn't constrict around the dick shoved down it and begin to suffocate him.

Ironic that the most dangerous part of this seems to be Will's own desires.

Hannibal doesn't knock, obviously, and Will opens his eyes when he hears the door shut and locked behind him. The gesture is somewhat ludicrous, none of his dogs can open doors, but Hannibal just seems to like the implication that Will is trapped here with him. "How are you feeling?" As he asks the question, Hannibal walks towards him.

"Impatient." Will's leg is jumping on the ground and he sees a small smile before a large hand blocks it and covers his forehead. Apparently Hannibal is satisfied with whatever he found since he steps back, looking towards the head of the bed.

He grabs a pillow. Will looks at him like he's grown another head.

"The priority will be keeping you as relaxed as possible for the duration of the knot," Hannibal explains, handing it over. "Pain, even mild, will distract you."

Will looks down at the pillow in his hands. "Whatever you say."

"Yes," Hannibal responds, pleased. "Now, on your knees."

It seems counterintuitive to talk about keeping Will relaxed and then immediately rile him up like that. Will swallows thickly, sliding off the bed, and Hannibal takes the spot freshly vacated, spreading his legs so Will can settle between them, kneeling on the damn pillow. "Is this… a good idea?"

"Of course not." Hannibal undoes the fly of his pants, pushing them away, and Will's hands jump up to pull the cock out of his underwear before Hannibal can do it himself. "If you

begin to suffocate I will not hesitate to injure you if it is necessary to extract myself."

Will sucks in a sharp breath. "Good," he eventually says, strangled. Hannibal's cock sits heavy in his hands. It looks so large, even not fully hardened like this. Even after having done it before he's not quite certain he can fit the thing in his mouth. He rubs his thumb along the head, tracing the glans underneath the foreskin.

"Let it harden in your mouth."

He doesn't even hesitate, opening his mouth and sliding the dick inside, closing his lips around it and sucking. It's easier if he closes his eyes and ignores visual stimuli, focusing instead on the feeling of the cock in his mouth, large and warm. He moves his head, gently, putting his hands on Hannibal's knees, and he feels a hand bury itself in the curls at the back of his head. There's no pressure yet. As he works he can feel the dick growing in his mouth and he backs off further and further until he pulls off completely, opening his eyes to see Hannibal fully hard, cock glistening with spit.

"I may find it hard to restrain myself," Hannibal tells him.

Will can feel himself hardening in his jeans, which suddenly feel too restrictive. "You know that you don't need to."

The hand on the back of his head pushes him forwards, now, Hannibal's dick pressing against his cheek. With a tiny smile, Will grabs the dick with one of his hands and guides it back into his mouth.

Even his lips stretch almost painfully to accommodate the cock. It's difficult to fit it all inside and he uses his hand on what he can't, hollowing his cheeks and sucking, massaging the underside with his tongue. Drool is starting to slip out of the corners of his mouth and the sounds he can hear himself making are obscene. He closes his eyes again, focusing on the feeling, the rhythm of his movements, the small guttural noises he can hear slipping out of Hannibal.

"Look at me," Hannibal growls and Will does, opening his eyes and looking up, heart stuttering when he sees the animalistic expression on Hannibal's face. He feels pressure on his cock through his pants and his body jerks forwards, burying the cock deeper in his mouth, and Will moans around it. "Take it out."

Will's hands shakily move to his own pants, opening them and pulling out his dick. No sooner have his hands left when he feels something else connect with it, narrower and longer, soft fabric covering- is that his fucking *foot?* He can't see that far down like this but a glance to the side, at Hannibal's knee, confirms the leg seems to be angled inwards. The foot presses down on the top of his cock, rubbing slowly at it, and Will closes his eyes again.

He focuses on breathing through his nose as he tries to take the cock deeper, hands on Hannibal's torso to steady himself. It bumps against the back of his throat and he nearly gags. Still, he does not stop, inching it further, feeling it curve down into his esophagus. He takes shallow breaths, slowly. It feels like it's not enough air but it's not nothing. He has no idea

how much more of Hannibal's cock there is to take, not until he feels pubic hair tickling his nose, and he pushes that last bit forwards until Hannibal's cock is buried in his throat.

"Good, Will," Hannibal groans. A second foot seems to join the first and they hold his dick between them. They try to jerk him but his dick slips out. Apparently this isn't something Hannibal's done before either, though Will wouldn't have even blinked if he'd revealed himself to be the world champion of footjobs.

The dick in his mouth twitches and Will groans around it, and now both of Hannibal's hands are clenched tightly in his hair. Feet make a second attempt and Hannibal is a quick learner as always, not losing his grip a second time. The sensation is weird, he can feel the warmth of skin underneath the thin socks, covered by the silky smoothness of whatever insane designer socks Hannibal is apparently wearing. There's less contact on his dick overall but he's pretty confident he doesn't even fucking need it, not with everything else to think about.

He pulls back, just enough for the dick to exit his throat, then he moves forwards, spit dripping down his chin. The hands move to his jaw and jerk him back, quicker this time only to pause. Will taps his fingers on Hannibal's chest until he has the man's attention and then gives him a thumbs up.

Hannibal yanks his head back much further and slams him back down, shoving the dick all the way back in with one quick thrust. Will's body tries to gag around it but doesn't even have the time. He slumps forwards, concentrates on not letting his teeth hit Hannibal's cock as the man violently fucks his mouth. Tears form in his eyes. He can tell Hannibal is losing focus so he holds the man's feet in place himself, rutting against them as he chokes on Hannibal's cock. Not giving his body time to reject it seems to work wonders.

Breathing is difficult, not impossible. He's starting to get light headed and tries to suck in deeper breaths when he has the opportunity but at this rate he feels like he might pass out before Hannibal even comes, much less gets the chance to knot him. One hand stays holding Hannibal's feet and the other slaps Hannibal's chest, asking for air.

Hannibal doesn't stop.

The hands on his jaw ignore his plight, using him like he's a cock sleeve and nothing more. He's roughly pulled back and forth, down on Hannibal's dick, and he can't stop rutting against the man's feet. The hand on Hannibal's torso stops hitting it, fingers curling and dropping away weakly, Will's eyes fluttering shut and his body going limp. Breathing through his nose is doing nothing, he can't breathe, he can't get any fucking air-

Hannibal jerks him back and off his cock entirely and Will takes huge gulps of precious oxygen. He's rock hard, almost painfully so, a firm hand on his shoulder warning him not to move. "Please," he whines, and he can tell how hoarse and broken his voice sounds from the abuse. "Hannibal."

The Alpha is watching, waiting for something, and then suddenly the hand on his shoulder is gone and he's pulled close, cheek to Hannibal's thigh, and the feet move. One is underneath his dick and the other on top, pressing together, just a gentle pressure.

The pressure increases and Will comes so suddenly it catches himself by surprise and his mouth opens in a wordless cry. A hand yanks him back by the hair, the other forcing his mouth wider, and Hannibal shoves his cock all the way back down his throat and Will feels semen shooting down, straight into his stomach.

The base of the cock starts to twitch and swell and Will's eyes roll back, nearly into his head. Pleasure from his orgasm makes his mind hazy and it feels almost dreamlike. The knot forces his mouth so wide as it fills, a painful stretch of his jaw, lips stretched to their limit.

A voice brings him back. "Breathe, Will. Relax."

He does. Through his nose Will is able to take tiny breaths, just enough to stop him from suffocating. It wouldn't last for long but it should be enough to last through the knot.

"You look beautiful like this." Another fresh spurt of semen goes down his throat and Will looks up with a shudder, meeting Hannibal's eyes. He looks enraptured. A hand cups around his jaw, thumb wiping away a tear. "Can you breathe?"

Just barely, Will nods, and Hannibal looks relieved. He can't tell if he's relieved because Will is okay or if he's relieved because that means he doesn't have to take his cock out of his mouth.

He's fine with either, honestly.

It's wrong to say he gets comfortable. He gets used to it. The pillow, he grudgingly admits, is helping. Will settles in in his position and tries to close his eyes, only for Hannibal to ask him to keep them open. It's the easiest way to tell he hasn't gone unconscious yet, he supposes. Every so often there is another wave of semen and he *knows* this isn't going to sit well in his stomach. A hand is in his hair, doing what can only be described as petting him, and Hannibal is murmuring something in a low tone, in a language Will doesn't understand.

There's no way for him to tell how long it's been or how much time remains until the knot deflates. His stomach is starting to cramp up and he points towards the trash can at the side of his bed frantically. "Ah," Hannibal says, looking towards it. "Too much semen, I presume? I cannot reach the can from here."

Will hopes he'll be quick enough after. Another spurt of semen goes down his throat and his body jerks. From the hiss he hears above him, his teeth probably grazed the knot. "Almost there, Will."

He tries to close his eyes and a hand slapping lightly on his cheek makes him open them once more. "Stay with me. One more minute to go."

It feels like the longest minute of Will's life. When the knot starts deflating it's a relief like no other. Hannibal pulls out quickly the moment it's safe to do so, sending Will to the floor, coughing and taking in big breaths. He can hear Hannibal quickly leaning over and grabbing the plastic trash can, dumping the contents onto the floor, and he passes it to Will just in time for him to vomit into it.

It's over quickly. "I hadn't considered that factor," Hannibal admits to him.

"That makes two of us." Will wipes his mouth and sits up straight. He can't help looking into the trash can. He'd skipped both lunch and dinner so all he can see is semen mixed with stomach acid, a frightening amount.

Had all of that been inside of him? His tired dick twitches at the thought.

He feels exhausted despite the fact that he hadn't done anything particularly exerting. Probably the whole being sick thing. "I had planned on feeding you after, though I suppose you won't be particularly in the mood for a meal after that."

Reflexively, Will grimaces. "Not really."

"Tomorrow, then." One hand grabs him by the side of his jaw and tilts his head up, the other flattening on his forehead. "Your fever has gone up."

"Predictably." Will's head throbs and he closes his eyes, wincing.

"Rest. I will keep an eye on you."

I bet you will, Will doesn't say. He stands on shaky feet, nearly collapsing into Hannibal's arms as a wave of vertigo overtakes him. Hannibal helps him change and get into bed since Will is on the verge of passing out at any second. He does it with an uncharacteristic amount of care.

There's no needles or IVs this time, Will notes. Maybe it's just because Hannibal already finished redecorating his house the first time.

Darkness takes him before he even hits the pillow.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

> Similarly to how the last chapter had most of the porn, this one has most of then potentially upsetting content. So, uh, have fun? Or I'm sorry. Whichever applies.

Everything is dark.

Beneath his feet, Will hears something crunching. Dead leaves? Snow? It's difficult to tell, sounds like it's coming from the bottom of a well, but the piercing cold makes him think it's the latter. His eyes are open but he cannot see through the black curtain of night. Up in the sky- is it the sky?- there's not a trace of stars, nor the moon. Just an endless sea of nothing. Ahead, he sees the one source of light; two piercing red eyes.

Like hell he's following that.

Will turns and walks in the opposite direction. He can hear something sprint past him a ways away, footsteps rapid, pushing aside leaves and branches as it runs. The forest, he must be in the forest. But why would he be out here? A glance over his shoulder reveals the red eyes right where he left them, so if anything is following him it's something else.

There's a clack of jaws snapping, fur brushing against his leg, and Will jolts. There's growling from all sides. He freezes, tries to get his bearings, and then suddenly there is a bark in front of him. Illuminated by some unseen source, a wolf sits on its haunches. Once more, it barks. *Danger,* his mind supplies. *Wolves only bark as an alarm.* He takes a step forward and the wolf scurries back, barking again.

Is it him that they're afraid of?

The wolf turns and runs and Will breaks into a sprint, chasing after it. It has to tell him what the danger is, before it gets him too. *Wait,* he tries to say. No words come out. So he runs. The trees he can't even see part for him and slowly but surely, he's gaining on the wolf.

He corners it in a clearing and it backs up against a rock face, or maybe a thick cluster of trees. It starts growling and he hears the sound repeated from all around him. He takes a step forwards, the ground suddenly feeling much firmer beneath his feet. Another step. The growling dissolves into barking, a loud cacophony from many mouths, and after he takes another step Will notices.

The wolf is staring over his shoulder, looking at something behind him.

Slowly, Will turns his head, tries to look behind him, and catches a glimpse of a dark figure crowned in antlers before-

Will wakes up hyperventilating.

The first thing he registers is that he's freezing cold, barefoot, and beneath his foot he feels- tile?

He's on the roof. The stars are bright.

"Will," he hears.

Shakily, he turns his head, coming face to face with Hannibal, standing beside him without a single care in the world. "Wh-what-"

"You were sleepwalking."

Will buries his face in his hands, tries to stay calm. The barking never stopped, he realizes, so his dogs must be gathered at the window. "Why didn't you wake me up?"

"It is not recommended to wake a sleepwalker if it can be avoided, as it can be dangerous. If you had walked forwards any further I would have regardless."

That- Will removes his hands and looks out at how close he had gotten to the edge of the roof. *That's a fucking myth,* he wants to say, but there's no point because Hannibal is fully aware of the fact himself. He takes a step backwards, breath quickening, heart racing. What if Hannibal hadn't been here? Would he have walked right off the edge and hurt himself, ended up dying in the cold? The prospect doesn't excite him, it *terrifies* him. "I almost-"

The distress in his voice must be evident since Hannibal interrupts him. "You would not have fallen, Will. Not while I was around."

But what happens when you're not around?

"Will. Take deep breaths, slowly. You must calm yourself."

"I-I can't," Will whines, panic building. He fists his hand in his hair and pulls, trying to ground himself through the pain. "I've never, this has never- what's *happening to me?* "

Hannibal grabs him by the upper arm and tries to urge him inside but Will's feet slip on the tile and he falls backwards, only for Hannibal to catch him. He's pulled up into Hannibal's arms and carried back through the window, dogs nosing at him in worry, stopping at the doorway to his bedroom and left outside when Hannibal closes the door with his foot. He sets Will down on the bed and crouches in front of him. "Will. Look at me."

Will's arms curl around his torso now, shaking. He looks at Hannibal, tears starting to form in his eyes. "Something is wrong with me, Hannibal. This isn't normal."

"Nothing about you is normal. Will, you have to trust me."

Can he? He had nearly walked off the roof and Hannibal had been right there beside him, just observing. Would he have let him fall, hoping it injured him badly enough to steal him away again? This behavior isn't a surprise, he knows what Hannibal is like, but right now the panic overrides anything else, goosebumps rising all over his body, the overpowering urge to flee- "I can't calm down. I-I can't focus. Help me, Hannibal. *Please.* "

Hannibal's eyes, just barely, take on a tint of red. "Very well." He stands, adjusts his tie, pauses. "Before we proceed, there is something long overdue."

"Make it- quickly."

"A safeword."

The shock of it nearly hurls Will out of his panic right then and there, but it creeps back in. What is he planning on doing? Something particularly dangerous? Is this just an excuse to- "Fine. Alabama."

"Alabama it is. Stand, Will."

Hannibal stands with him, swapping their positions, sitting down on the bed. He regards Will with inquisitive eyes, watching as he shakes, hands twitching aimlessly at his sides, eyes tracking back and forth. He has no idea what to do.

"Close your mouth and keep your tongue away from your teeth."

Will does it, fights the urge to ask why and do the opposite, and then a hand reaches up, fisting in his undershirt, pulling him forwards and the world spins. Hannibal is pulling him somewhere but he has to close his eyes so he doesn't vomit, just feels himself being rearranged and dragged, holds on and waits for it to stop.

"Open your eyes, Will."

He does. He sees the wall, pillows, registers that Hannibal is seated at the head of the bed and he's on top, kneeling over his thighs, facing him, and as he looks Hannibal's skin goes pitch dark, smooth and featureless, and he closes his eyes with a shudder. A hand on the back of his head pushes his head down, forehead on Hannibal's shoulder, and there he remains, hunched over. Hannibal spreads his legs, forcing Will to do the same, until he's slumped against his chest, holding on like he's afraid Hannibal will fade away if he lets go.

"Everything is going to be okay, Will."

Meaningless platitudes. "I don't want reassurance, Hannibal," Will groans, muffled into Hannibal's shirt. "You know that."

"I suppose I just wanted to see what it would feel like to say that."

Like some sort of alien trying to work out an understanding of social norms. The idea of Hannibal as something *other* sends his heart racing, panic building once more- "How did it feel?"

“Hollow. I can’t imagine why people do it.”

“For comfort.”

“You don’t want comfort.” Hannibal spreads his legs further, until Will’s own start to ache. “You want distraction.” He presses a gentle kiss to the side of Will’s neck and he expects the bite of teeth to follow, but it never does. “I would like to try something new.”

Sweat is beading down Will’s spine and he nods, skin clammy. His body feels like it’s on fire. “Sure. Whatever. Just do something. *Hurt me.* ”

“No,” Hannibal whispers in his ear. “I don’t think I will.”

Will jerks back in surprise only for hands to catch the sides of his face and bring him closer, kissing him. It’s a tender, slow thing, all of the violent hunger he’s used to entirely absent, and he’s not sure he likes it. It feels too normal, settles under his skin like an itch, something he has to rip up and tear out. Hannibal kisses along his mouth, tracing the lips to the corner, then down along the side of his jaw, up to his ear. “Have I ever told you how beautiful you are?”

That settles just as poorly, another layer of poison. “Why would you?”

“Because it is the truth.”

“Stop it,” Will trembles, hands tightening on Hannibal’s shoulder. “Whatever this is, stop.”

“There is nothing to stop. I am merely telling you how I feel.”

“You’re-” he wants to tell Hannibal this isn’t necessary, none of this charade is or ever was. A hand strokes down his neck, moves to a pec and squeezes, finger brushing across his nipple. “No,” he says, weakly. “I don’t want to *think* .”

“Every part of you is breathtaking.” Hannibal catches his nipple between two of his fingers, pinching, rolling it between them until the nub hardens. He presses down on it with his thumb, massaging, rubbing it in circles. “You set every one of my senses on fire.”

It’s both honest and hollow, far too little to communicate the breadth of his feelings. Will can see that, Hannibal *knows* he can see that, is he pulling away? Why here, why now? A second hand mirrors the first and Will shifts uncomfortably on Hannibal’s lap. “Stop,” he whines, a part of himself recoiling at how desperate he sounds.

“You don’t have to be afraid, Will. I’ll be good to you.” Will tries to back up, away, out of this unfamiliar grip, but a hand quickly snaps to the back of his neck, holding him in place. “You must not run away.”

“I’m not,” he tries to protest, he doesn’t want to run away, he just wants Hannibal to be *Hannibal,* not this pitiful mockery. “You just-”

“I just what, Will?” The hand not holding him in place drags down his torso, slipping under the edge of his undershirt and trailing back up, teasing him just as gently as before. “Are my

words so foreign to you?”

“That’s not it.” He closes his eyes, unable to look at that perfect mask of adoration any longer.

“Has no one told you that you’re beautiful before?”

Will makes a low noise, broken, and tries to hide himself in Hannibal’s shoulder. Satisfied that he won’t try to escape any longer the hand on his neck runs down, tracing the mating bite before moving on, down his spine and around his hip until it lands over where he’s still mostly soft in his boxer-briefs. He responds to the warmth, the pressure, despite the unease in his head and heart. “Stop talking.”

His protests go ignored. “The beauty of your body is only eclipsed by that of your mind.” The hand slips under his boxer-briefs, fingers curling around his disinterested cock, the warmth forcing it to finally twitch to life. “What wondrous things you see, Will.”

The words are empty, shells of what they should be. He can see that dark figure in his mind, antlers severed at the base, proportions much more human. A wild beast pretending to be domesticated. Will stops protesting, since it won’t do anything anyways. Hannibal pulls him out of his boxer-briefs, stroking slowly as he whispers more sweet nothings into his ear. An apt descriptor considering the words are all air and spun sugar, an illusion that would melt away at the slightest disturbance.

“You were stunning from the moment I saw you but it was the things you said that truly drew me in. I was caught before I knew it.” His chest is starting to feel irritated from the constant attention and he clings onto that promise, waits for irritation to turn to pain, until something in his voice gives it away. The hands swap places, one moist with sweat and precum pressing into the flesh of his ignored pec, smoothing over the nipple and tugging. “How sensitive you are. Your body responds so pleasingly.”

And he hates it, because it does, despite the roiling in his stomach. Just a simple touch from Hannibal is already enough to get him antsy, hot under the collar, anticipating further contact. The hand on his dick strokes him with a steady rhythm, slow and unflinching. He can’t tell if the heat in his body is from the fever or this contact. His hips try to buck up into Hannibal’s grip, barely moving, so tired and pliant. “Let me take care of you,” Hannibal whispers, and Will digs his nails into Hannibal’s shoulders.

He pushes himself away, upright, as far as his arms will allow, removing Hannibal’s hand from his chest. He can’t take another moment of those honeyed words. When he opens his eyes he sees a mess of emotions on Hannibal’s face, an unsolvable mixture of both fake and real. He wants to drink it down and hope it kills him. “You’re perfect for me,” Hannibal tells him, and whatever swirling emotions are in his eyes they don’t match up with the words he’s speaking. “The perfect mate.”

Will’s own words thrown back at him. He’s being punished for his own sweet whispers from before. “Stop this.”

There's no answer, just Hannibal leaning in, flicking his tongue over Will's nipple, the hand on his dick keeping up the slow and steady rhythm. Unchanging. He wants teeth biting down, pain, to be treated poorly, *anything* other than this. There is nothing. Everything is soft, gentle, the pantomime of a considerate, caring lover. "You even feel it here," Hannibal murmurs, hot breath ghosting over Will's chest.

That could be shameful, if he can't get physical violence he can at least bait barbed words- "Like a woman."

"No," Hannibal immediately responds, and of course that didn't work, how the fuck did he think that ever had a chance or working? "You are like no one else."

"I'm not special," Will gasps, Hannibal sucking on his nipple. He's never had this much attention paid to his chest before, Hannibal usually bites him there just like everywhere else and it all blends into sweet, overbearing pain, so this unwelcome sensation is alien to him. It's milder, a different sort of pleasure, one that only serves to strengthen everything else. Hannibal's tongue flicks over his nipple again and he shudders.

The noises coming out of him are breathy, distress mixed with satisfaction. He wants Hannibal to stop but he doesn't, torn between unease at his actions and his body enjoying the attention. "Of course you are," Hannibal dismisses, and then he's moving down, kissing a trail down Will's chest, down his hips and-

Will curls his body over Hannibal's as that mouth envelops his cock, warm and wet. His hands curl in his hair and he wants to pull, inflict pain, but angering Hannibal will only make this worse. "Fuck," he hisses, because for all Hannibal had said about Will being good at this, there's no way he was *this* good. Even now, with this, Hannibal is slow, methodical, moving up and down his cock, hollowing his cheeks as he sucks, and finally this starts to blow away Will's creeping fears.

It's not surprising when Hannibal pulls off of him, makes him refocus. "Look at me, Will," he urges, and Will can't help but oblige. He watches as Hannibal takes his dick in his mouth, swallows it down, never breaking eye contact, always watching with that piercing gaze.

Will searches those eyes for something, anything, a trace of that brutality he has come to appreciate. He sees nothing, truly, Hannibal is hiding again, and a soft, pathetic noise escapes him. "No."

"Do not be afraid," Hannibal rumbles as he pulls off, lips red and slick with spit. "I will always take care of you."

"I don't want you to," Will grits out, teeth clenched, trying to fend off the pleasure. He doesn't want to come, not like this.

"Why not? It is what you deserve. To be cherished." He starts jerking Will off again, dick held next to his face, looking perfectly unflappable.

"Shut the fuck up," Will manages, his body tingling, vision starting to blur, heat blossoming and building within him. "I don't want to hear this from you." He wants Hannibal to lose

control.

“Do my emotions make you uncomfortable?”

No, Will can’t make himself say. *Only when they’re fake.* He takes in a deep breath and only recognizes it as a sob when tears slip free, rolling down his cheeks.

“Don’t cry.” Through the haze, he sees a sliver of something real; *I can’t control myself if you cry.*

He clings to it. “Don’t,” Will tries to say. *Don’t control yourself.* The pleasure is building rapidly, he’s close, he hates this but he’s still going to come from it. Betrayed by his body. “I hate this.”

“Good,” Hannibal tells him, and Will comes with another stifled sob.

His arms give way and he falls backwards, against the bed, squeezing his eyes shut, trying to quell the thoughts racing inside of him. Why the fake attitude, after everything they’ve done together, why is he pulling away, what did Will *do*-

“You did not stop me,” Hannibal comments.

He could have. At any moment, one word would have ended the agony. “Never do that again.”

“It is not the flu,” he abruptly volunteers. “You are seriously ill.”

That can’t be why, Will thinks. *It can’t be that, it can’t just be that he feels the need to treat me gently if I’m suffering. He doesn’t think like that, he only pretends*- “With what?”

“I’m not going to tell you,” Hannibal murmurs, and the next time Will sobs it’s with relief.

The fever breaks. Hannibal doesn’t tell him. They go back to work like nothing ever happened.

He finds himself daydreaming about what might be wrong with him. The words had been mockeries at the time but he knows Hannibal is intensely fascinated with every aspect of him, particularly the mental, and wouldn’t let anything irreparably damage him in that manner. Physically is another story. Maybe something is wrong with an organ, maybe he’ll end up needing a transplant. Hannibal could probably arrange such a complex and difficult solution at the drop of a hat.

It’s probably really, *really* fucking bad that thinking about all of this only excites him, like he’s trying to guess the gift Santa brought him for Christmas.

The case continues to stagnate. Price and Zeller finally manage to get their 3D printed corpse but all it really drives home is how violent the attack was, seeing it at full scale for the first time. They have to be careful about what information they glean from it since it's just a recreated copy, prone to human error.

It mostly just makes Will even angrier that they never got the real thing.

His sleep at night is suffering, making him exhausted and snappy at work. Hannibal helps him when he can but there are still days he is not with them, and on one such day Will's anger gets the best of him and Jack recommends he take the rest of the day off.

It's the type of recommendation you can't decline, and Will drives back home to Wolf Trap with his hands gripping the steering wheel so tightly it leaves marks on his palms.

The dogs are excited to see him back early and his mood lifts until everything gives way to confusion. There's a package waiting on his porch.

Since he lives so far from town Will mostly uses a PO box closer to civilization, though he knows it is still possible to get things shipped out here directly, albeit expensively. Most of the time things shipped directly are related to cases from the FBI, but that clearly could not be the case at the moment. He approaches it with caution, trying to see if he can glean anything from tire tracks in the ground. He can't decipher much beyond the fact that a car came out to deliver them, which was a given. No snow yet.

He picks up the package. While he doesn't recognize the sender it's pretty easy to deduce that it's some sort of medical company, likely pharmaceutical. Wrong address is the most logical explanation, but out here? Surely they would have noticed the comically high shipping fees and fixed the mistake before it even occurred.

With a frown, he looks closer, at the stamps denoting the package as having been processed through the postal system. Something about them bothers him.

He takes the package inside, gets the dogs settled, and then takes a closer look.

The magnifying glass on his fly tying station is difficult to remove so he simply takes the package there, sets it down and moves the lens over the stamps. The marks from the postal system should be uniform, left by literal stamps, but under closer inspection, these appear to have been drawn by hand. A forgery.

Someone wanted to make it look like it was shipped while hand delivering the package themselves.

Hannibal is the only person he can think of that would bother with something this pointlessly elaborate. He's also exactly the sort of person who would have the right knowledge and connections to sneak out some sort of drug he probably isn't supposed to have. What the hell is he trying to do with this?

Will opens the package very carefully. It doesn't explode or dust him with some sort of unidentifiable powder, which is a good sign. It does, in fact, appear to have some sort of

medication inside.

He doesn't recognize it. After inspecting the packaging with a frown, Will finally resorts to looking up the drug online. It reveals itself to be a hormonal drug, something typically given to Omegas to help treat a hormone deficiency, so it makes absolutely no sense to be giving it to a Beta like Will. The most it would do is potentially inflict some of its side effects. No amount of research turns up alternative uses for the medication so he scans the side effects, stopping when he sees *nausea and vomiting.*

Had Hannibal found something new he liked out of their earlier disaster? If that's what he's after surely there are easier ways to inflict it. Additionally, while Will is more than willing to replicate their earlier adventures, if Hannibal is gunning for inflicting nausea and nothing else Will's gonna have to let him down gently, there.

It's hard to guess what the other man could possibly be plotting so he shoves the medication in a closet for the time being and waits for Hannibal to bring it up himself. There's no way he's going to start taking a random medication off vague suggestion alone, and he knows Hannibal would never expect him to.

Oddly, Hannibal never brings it up. Maybe he's waiting for circumstances to align.

As time goes by Will starts to find himself forgetting things, leaving windows open and coming home to find the house freezing and the dogs huddled around heaters, misplacing odds and ends throughout the house. It has to be related to whatever's wrong with him. He considers telling Hannibal but he trusts the man to monitor him and step in when things are really bad.

So Will ignores them.

Maybe it's the stagnation that triggers it, but Jack pays their unreliable witness a follow up visit, taking Beverly with him. While they're away, Will and Hannibal are revisiting the killer profiles when the man gets a call and has to step away to take it.

He only would have answered if it had been important, so Will's not surprised when he comes back only to leave. "An emergency has come up regarding one of my patients. I'm afraid I must go."

"Of course," Will replies, something nagging at him in the back of his head. He ignores it. "Go. We're obviously fine here."

"I will contact you as soon as things are resolved." He leans in to quickly kiss Will, and that had taken some getting used to at first, but it's just another normal part of their day at this point. With that, he departs.

Nothing happens until Beverly comes back, a scowl etched on her face. "I can see why you don't like the guy."

"Something happen?"

She throws herself into an empty chair next to Will. “Guy was borderline hostile when he saw us. He even had the gall to ask where *you* were.”

The nausea comes free of charge, this time. “Can’t imagine Jack took kindly to that.”

“Ripped the guy a new one, so I doubt we’ll be hearing from him again. I think I heard the dude *growl* at some point. You said he’s a Beta, right?”

Will nods. “Had to have triple checked it with him. Never called himself anything else.”

“So he just sucks. Where’d your house husband go?”

He ignores the prod and settles for an actual explanation. In his mind, something else is growing, and he can’t make himself let go of it.

It follows him throughout the rest of work, through the drive home, past dinner and into the night. Usually he reads before bed but tonight he sits down and thinks, moving the pieces around, trying to make them think.

Hannibal had brought up the possibility of an Alpha who is unable to properly bond, an idea that had resurfaced ever since the strange medication had been sent to his house. It dragged the memory back up and it refuses to sink back down this time, like it’s caught on the edge of something sharp. They’d ruled out anyone with a similar condition that lives anywhere near any of the crime scenes, so it ultimately was considered a dead end.

But what if that was close, but not exact? He thinks of their witness, pretending to scent Will, growling at intruders. Will had gotten an uncomfortably close look at the man and still thinks he hadn’t been lying or hiding something when he called himself a Beta. Despite that, he mimicked the mannerisms of an Alpha. What if something similar was occuring with their killer?

That clicks into place, and things start to make sense. Will glances at the clock- it’s past midnight. It can wait for tomorrow. It’d only be urgent if their witness was somehow the killer, but he has solid alibis for the other kills, so it can’t possibly be him. He’ll bring it up at work tomorrow. Maybe Hannibal will be back by then and he can run it by him first.

The connection makes him antsy so he drinks a glass of whiskey before bed, hoping it will calm him. It does the trick and his exhaustion hits him suddenly, so powerful that he barely has time to make it up the stairs and collapse into his bed before falling asleep.

Will wakes slowly, and with a feeling gnawing deep in his gut that something is wrong.

There’s no morning light filling the room and he sits up, trying to adjust to the dark. His head feels foggy and he thinks it might be the fever but it’s more like his thoughts are still intact, just far away and difficult to reach.

It's distant, but he can hear his dogs barking. Outside. Had he forgotten to let them back outside? Fuck, how long had it been, it's freezing-

"Finally, you're awake!"

Will freezes. He recognizes that voice.

"I'm going to turn the lights on now, okay?"

His eyes shut against the sudden brightness and when he opens them, he sees none other than their unreliable witness sitting down in a chair turned to face the bed.

He's holding a gun.

Will lets himself lean to the left, near the edge of the bed, there's a shotgun underneath, if he can just get to it fast enough-

"You really don't think I would have left that underneath the bed, do you?"

When he leans over further to check, the man doesn't stop him. The shotgun is indeed missing. He's been in his house before, all the times Will thought he left the window open, he's been planning this for a while- he's their killer. A cold realization hits Will, then. He's the next target.

But he doesn't fit the pattern. "What do you want?"

"Don't be so nervous, Will. I'm here to save you!"

Will blinks, frowns, lets that sink in. While he's pondering, the man keeps talking. "I was worried I'd get the dosage wrong, but you woke up right on time!"

The cap on the bottle of whiskey had seemed a little loose, *fuck*- "Sorry, you said you're here to *save* me?"

"From that horrible Alpha of yours."

"I don't need saving." Will scans the room, trying to find his phone, but it's nowhere within sight. This is bad. This is really, really bad.

The exaggerated, false grin on the killer's face drops, inverts into a scowl. "I've seen the way he treats you. You don't have to hide it."

Outside his house, Hannibal had pulled him closer roughly to take his temperature. He must have been watching out the window. "No, you don't understand-"

The killer cuts him off. "You poor thing. An Omega like you deserves someone who will support you and help you through your troubles."

Will's mind grinds to a halt. "I'm a Beta," is all he can say. "Like you."

“You don’t have to lie to me.” The man- is his name even actually James?- he stands up, walks closer, and Will can’t help flinching away. He leans in, closes his eyes, parts his mouth and makes a show of pretending to scent Will. “Your scent is so sweet. Forest, caramel, and the salt of the sea. He made you stop taking your suppressants, didn’t he?”

He slides away, to the other side of the bed. Some delirious part of himself wonders if this guy got the wrong house. “I’m a Beta,” Will repeats. “Whatever wild stories you make up won’t change that. A Beta, like you.”

The man leans back and smiles. “Ah, but you see, I’m not a *normal* Beta.”

Everything finally snaps into place and Will realizes just how dire this situation is. This man is delusional, thinks he’s a Beta with the abilities of an Alpha, that’s why he hasn’t been able to bond with any of his victims, why he thinks the same ruse will work on Will. His actions and guesses must have been convincing enough to fool the Omegas at first, blind them with terror before they slowly realized he’s full of shit. Will knows the chances of someone finding him after he’s been kidnapped are low, so he has to stop it from happening in the first place. His body still feels heavy, sluggish from the drug. He needs to buy time until it wears off and he can try to disarm the man. “Listen to me. I’m *not an Omega.* You’re wrong.”

“Stop lying,” the man hisses. “You’ve been on the cusp of heat both times you came to my home. Flaunting it like that.”

“I was sick,” Will tries to protest. “That was a *fever.* I’m a Beta, I can’t do anything you want me to.”

The man’s expression shifts and Will realizes he’s run head first into another delusion. “Oh,” he sighs, “is that what you mean? Did that Alpha tell you this? Just because you’re having difficulties, it doesn’t mean you’re not an Omega.”

The medication. It’d been from him. Will almost wants to laugh.

“Besides,” James continues, turning towards the nearby wardrobe. “If you’re really not an Omega, what is all of this?”

This has to be a dream at this point, because there’s no way Will is watching an intruder pull open the drawer full of sex toys to use as incriminating evidence. He wants to scream. “What does that have to do with anything?”

He picks up the lube, holding it up with a sad look. “Don’t worry. I’ll help you.”

“I don’t need to be helped!” Will finally snaps. He’s starting to regain full feeling in his limbs, just a bit longer. “You realize that if anything happens to me the entire FBI will be on your ass, right?”

“Not if they don’t know it was me.”

“Hannibal, he has a highly sensitive sense of smell, he’ll be able to tell.”

“I know how to cover my tracks. Let’s stop talking about that horrid Alpha of yours, shall we?”

Despite the situation, Will bristles. “Stop talking about him like that.”

“He’s got your brainwashed,” James sighs sadly. “I’ve seen the way he treats you. Not even stopping when you asked him to, going until you cried.”

Nausea hits him, then. “How could you- what are you talking about?”

“He installed cameras, you know.” He gestures to the bookcase. “I understand how frightening that must be to hear. Didn’t even bother to secure the network properly.”

But Will’s mind is racing. Hannibal installing cameras is… new information, but not surprising, and Will isn’t really bothered by it. The unsecure network is so glaring an oversight that it has to have been intentional. Most likely, Hannibal had done it with the intention of Will discovering it some day. Neither of them could have anticipated it being abused in this manner. The thought that someone else had *seen* them, watched when Will had been so vulnerable- “That- that was private.”

“Clearly it wasn’t. He’s probably selling it.”

There’s absolutely no chance Hannibal would let another soul see that footage. He’s fiercely possessive and would probably keep Will locked up in a dungeon if it meant no one else ever got to see or touch his mate.

If he doesn’t get out of this, that’s a situation he’s going to end up in either way. He tests his fingers, clenching and unclenching them into fists. Almost ready. He’d rather risk getting shot than get kidnapped by this man. “Shut up,” Will growls. “You don’t know him. You don’t know either of us.”

Rage twists the man’s expression and he advances. “I didn’t want to resort to this, but you’ve forced my hand.” His hand snaps behind Will’s head, grabs him by the back of his neck, and forces him down onto the sheets.

Will is still mostly out of shock. *A cowing gesture for an Omega,* his mind helpfully supplies. “What are you-”

“Thought that might have issues,” the intruder mutters, sticking the gun in the waistband of his pants, and this is Will’s shot, he just needs his limbs to move-

The killer pulls something out of his pocket, a syringe, and sticks it in Will’s neck, depressing the plunger. No, he was so close, this can’t be happening, this can’t be-

“My dogs,” he croaks, with the last of his awareness.

“Don’t worry. I’ll let them back inside.”

And then everything goes black.

Will wakes to an unfamiliar room.

The walls and floors are concrete and it's sparsely furnished. He's laying in a bed until he sits up, a cheap metal frame and mattress, and the movement of him sitting makes something rattle. It feels like there's something around his ankle so he flips the sheets and duvet over, revealing a metal cuff.

Will closes his eyes and counts to ten. He needs to stay calm.

When he opens his eyes back up he pulls his leg up closer to him and examines the cuff. It's sturdy, takes a key, and the inside and edges are lined with soft cushioning so it won't injure him unless he *really* struggles. There is a metal chain attached, thick links solidly welded, and as he examines the length of it he can't find any weak points. It's firmly attached to the floor, probably anchored to heavy stones underneath the layer of concrete.

The chain is long as he follows it, allowing him to roam the back half of the room, the half opposite the stairs up. He must be in a basement. There is a bathroom within his range, doorless, stocked with supplies save anything that could be potentially repurposed as a weapon. There's not even a mirror.

It's probably too much to hope for the chain or cuff being made out of something that would rust.

He exits the bathroom and goes back into the larger basement room, continuing to explore. There's a small bookshelf nearby, currently empty, and that seems to be the only piece of furniture other than the bed. Far on the other side of the room there's a metal folding chair but it's clearly not intended for his use since it's outside of the range of his chain. He raises his gaze up, clocks multiple cameras on the ceiling, and there's a small window, too small for an adult to fit through but fitted with bars nonetheless.

The only way he'll be getting out of here is up the stairs, and he doesn't have to check to know that door will be tightly locked.

Since there's nothing else to do he takes a closer look at the window, to where it leads. The window sits right on top of the ground and all he can see outside of it is grass and trees. They're somewhere remote, certainly not where they'd gone to interview the witness multiple times, and since he'd been knocked out he has no way of knowing how far they traveled to get here.

Will sits back down on the bed. This is bad. This is really, really bad.

He hadn't even gotten the chance to tell anyone about his new suspicions before he'd gotten kidnapped, and that would have pointed them in the right direction. Regardless, once his absence had been noticed, the killer would probably be one of the first stops they made. Jack wouldn't have anything on the man other than distrust, but Hannibal… the best shot he has at

being rescued is Hannibal. He's willing to skirt the law in pursuit of his goals even when he barely cares about the result so god only knows what he'll be willing to do here.

None of that matters if none of them can fucking find him, though.

Growing irritated, Will scratches his chin, flinching when his fingers make contact with smooth skin. The fucker shaved him.

So that's how this is going to be.

There's movement overhead, a door opening and closing followed by footsteps, and Will falls still and listens. They make their way towards the top of the stairs and he can hear locks being turned before the door swings open, and soon his captor is descending into the basement.

"Good morning!" James greets, like he's speaking to an old friend. "Or good afternoon, I suppose. You slept for a while."

"You're not going to get away with this," Will goads, trying to draw the man closer. If he gets within reach Will may be able to subdue him, or worse. Even if he doesn't have the key to the cuffs on him there's probably some way he can escape with the aid of various body parts, possibly bones. Maybe he can saw his own foot off if it really comes down to it.

"I already did, didn't I?" The man is smart enough to stand outside Will's range of movement despite the fact that he hasn't moved off the bed. "They'll be none the wiser."

"Hannibal will know."

"He might," the man admits, which makes Will's stomach drop. "That doesn't mean anyone will find you, though."

So they're somewhere *very* remote, likely a place Will would have trouble navigating himself even if he managed to escape. Probably deep in a forest. If they're somewhere in the George Washington and Jefferson, that's nearly two million acres of land to cover, though more than half of that is extremely unlikely to house any kind of functioning cabin like the one they're in. Not that eight hundred thousand acres is a promising number either. "What do you want from me?" He knows, mostly, but he'd like to know the full scope of what he's dealing with.

"Like I told you, I want to help you." The man steps closer, still out of range, frustratingly near. "I can treat your condition, make you healthy again."

"I don't have any *condition.* " Ironically, he actually does, and he doesn't have time to panic about whatever untreated illness Hannibal had left him with, but he knows that's not what this man is referring to.

"You don't have to be ashamed of it," James tells him, trying to soothe. "I'll help you through this."

"I-" Will snaps his mouth shut, because this is like arguing with a brick wall. If you could talk someone out of their delusions that easily they wouldn't be delusions in the first place.

“Okay, so I’m assuming you have some sort of long-term plan here. I’ll humor you. What happens next?”

A pleased smile grows on the man’s face. He thinks Will is accepting him. “We can try medications until we find one that works.” Will bristles at that, but allows him to continue. “You won’t have to try so hard to be something you’re not. I know that changing old habits will be difficult, but I promise I’ll be there every step of the way.”

Will goes cold. He has a feeling he knows exactly what kind of modifications are being alluded to, and being starved and weakened only lowers his chances of escape even further. He can’t afford to rely on being rescued as his only option. “I don’t want to,” he tries, attempting to appeal to the killer’s softer side. “I like the way I am.”

Sadly, James shakes his head. “I can tell that you don’t. Whatever that *man-”* and the word is spat out with unexpected venom- “-that *Alpha* who forced himself on you, whatever he said, made you do; you don’t have to be afraid of him anymore.”

“He never forced me to do anything.” Mostly true.

“The one way bite is proof enough.”

Fuck. Hannibal’s bite is in an unusual location, somewhere it definitely wouldn’t be if Will had been an Omega or even an Alpha. Fully hidden under his clothing. “I did bite him,” he tries to protest.

“But you didn’t really, did you?” That sets off something deep inside of Will, an unintentional land mine. His fists clench. “He won’t let you *really* bite him, but he wasted no time biting you. Wants you all to himself but doesn’t want to be tied down in return. Disgusting.”

“But I did,” Will says quietly, looking away, trying to be meek, and the man moves towards him, into his range, and Will lunges off the bed.

His fingertips brush against the man’s clothing but he reacts too quickly, taking rapid steps backwards until the chain pulls taught and halts Will, whose face is contorted into a snarl. That won’t work again. He had one chance, and he blew it. “You bastard,” he growls, straining, trying to reach for something to hit, to claw at, to *hurt-*

The man shakes his head. “And here I thought you were doing so well. I think we’ll skip the meals today. You need to lose weight anyhow.”

Will collapses onto the ground, head in his hands, emotions starting to overwhelm him. “Just let me go,” he says quietly. He knows it’s pointless, won’t do anything, but he has to try. He *has to try.* “I can’t give you what you want. Please, just let me go.”

“Of course you can,” the man says, and it’s obvious what part of the statement he’s replying to. “You’re not like the rest of them, Will. You’re *special.* I can feel it. We were made for each other. ”

Will chokes back a sob and doesn't reply.

Will refuses to take the medication at first. He's not so much worried about the effect it might have on him as he is worried about letting James win this particular battle. It's less pride and more a fear of what the concession will lead to, further down the road.

It quickly becomes a moot point since James refuses to feed him if he's not taking the medication. Losing the battle is bad, but starving to death is even worse. So he starts taking the damn medication. It makes him nauseous, probably, and he's never really sure if it really is because of the medication or a result of his circumstances.

So he does what he does next because he's pissed off. That's what he tells himself. He's angry, rash, and still can't shake the urge to break something. Convincing yourself is the first step to convincing everyone else. Will walks to the tiny window and looks at the glass, runs his fingers across it. It doesn't seem particularly thick. Perfect.

He walks back to the bed, wraps a sheet around his arm as he heads back to the window, stands on his toes and drives his elbow into the glass, shattering it.

Will winces. Despite his measures, it must have cut him. He ignores that pain in favor of cleaning the glass away, sweeping fragments to the floor and pulling on the bars on the other side. They seem very sturdy, unmovable. It's not something he has a chance of pulling loose or removing, so that particular escape is off the table. He stretches further, pushes his arm through the window, feeling around in the grass. There's nothing helpful here, no rocks or other heavy objects, and now the door at the top of the stairs is unlocking so he's run out of time.

James storms down the stairs and soon he feels hands on his shirt, yanking him backwards and away from the shattered window. "What are you doing?" the man cries, like it's not perfectly fucking obvious. Will doesn't meet his eyes, not even when he's shoved backwards until he stumbles and sits down on the bed. "Why would you do that?"

He doesn't dignify that with a response, which only seems to make James angrier. A fist collides with his stomach unexpectedly and Will gasps, doubling over and clutching his stomach. He can feel his blood seeping into the sheet wrapped around his arm.

"You need to learn how to behave," James hisses. "Stay there and don't you dare move."

There's not much else for him to do, all the shards on the ground are too tiny to use as a weapon, so Will sits on the bed and unwraps the sheet to examine his injury. It's a clean cut, just above his elbow, not particularly deep. It still needs to be bandaged. He's still looking at it when James runs back down with a broom and a dustpan to sweep up the glass. At the sight of blood, he hesitates. "You cut yourself."

“Glass is often sharp,” Will drones, pressing his fingers to the wound. It hurts when he puts pressure on it.

“Stop that!” James seems like he’s going to go for Will for a moment, but he shakes his head and cleans the glass up instead. “You’re going to make it worse. I’ll be right back with some bandages.”

I know, Will doesn’t say. *I want to make it worse.* He presses his fingers deeper, more blood flowing from the wound, until suddenly hands on his shoulders push him back, against the bed.

“I told you to stop,” James growls, and Will finally relents. There’s a point when angering the man will only make things harder and it’s not worth the temporary satisfaction. “Don’t move. Again.”

When James leaves Will sits up, looks over at the floor beneath the window without getting off the bed. He cleaned it well, no fragments of glass left behind. Figures. With a sigh, Will relaxes onto the bed, sitting with his legs crossed and waiting for his captor to return.

It’s longer this time. Will closes his eyes and thinks of the stream, focusing on the flow of the water to pass the time until James finally returns with a box of band-aids and a roll of bandages, clearly unsure which to use. He takes one step towards Will before he snaps. “Don’t touch me.”

There’s a flash of outrage in his eyes before he visibly composes himself. He’s catching on to how Will tries to rile him up. Instead of striking him again he walks forwards, stopping a couple feet from the bed, and throws the supplies onto it. “Then do it yourself.”

Unfortunately, James isn’t budging until he sees Will treat the wound on his own. He’s starting to figure this version of Will out, which means he can’t use it much longer if he wants to survive through this. He doesn’t reach for the supplies immediately, that would be too uncharacteristic, so he waits several minutes before slowly collecting them and wrapping up the cut. When he’s done he lobs the items back to James. “There. Are you happy?”

Instead of a reply James looks up at the shattered window. “It gets cold at night. I’ll bring you more blankets later.” With that, he turns on his heel and ascends the stairs, locking the door to the basement behind him.

Finally left alone, Will forces himself not to look at the broken window. He looks down at the bed instead, like he’s defeated, like his plan has been ruined. Like it was impulsive and irrational.

“That was a pretty piss-poor attempt at escape, dude.”

The voice makes Will jolt and he sits up straight, turning his gaze towards the sound, finding Beverly seated in the metal folding chair just out of reach.

He blinks, watches her. She’s relaxed, has one leg crossed over the other, the picture of casual amusement. He closes his eyes, shakes his head, but when he reopens them, she remains. Is

this his brain's way of coping with confinement? "Who says it was an escape attempt?" It might be dangerous to admit that out loud, though he's pretty confident the cameras down here have no sound. It's unlikely James would have sat through all the things Will's hurled at him without coming down to give him a piece of his mind.

"Okay, well if it wasn't that, what the hell was your plan? Trying to gain his sympathy by hurting yourself? Cooling down the room?"

"I don't want to chance talking about it." There's still that bit of uncertainty, after all.

"You know you can just say it up here, right?" She taps the side of her head. "I'm just a hallucination, after all."

"Oh." He closes his eyes and the same scene unfolds before him. Identical to the one he saw in a much more literal sense. "He didn't even notice there was less glass than there should have been."

"Risky!" Beverly grins at him. "I like it. But why hide it out in the grass? Why not just stab him when he ran down to stop you?"

It's a question he asked himself, and apparently he's still not satisfied with the answer. It had simply felt wrong. "He's too on guard," Will tries. "He expects me to attack him. I don't want to risk a weapon when it has such a high chance of failing."

"Hmm." She looks like she doesn't really believe him. "Are you sure? Don't you just want to see the look on his face after you've earned his trust, only to slice his stomach open?"

"You sound like Hannibal."

"That's your fault," she points out, and he can't even bring himself to protest.

He doesn't try anything else, for the time being. Nothing major. He resorts to pettier assaults; running the shower so long the cabin runs out of hot water, never making eye contact with his captor, refusing to respond to any of his questions. Every time he's caught, scolded, and fakes remorse.

The way his body gets weaker isn't something he needs to fake. Even though he's being fed, it's only two small meals a day, and it won't be long before he starts losing weight. He's losing energy much faster. Despite this, he doesn't want to let himself become weaker, more vulnerable. So he exercises. It had always been enjoyable for him, a way to clear the thoughts from his head and focus on his body. It also helps keep him warm when the cold breeze sweeping into the room from the shattered window gets to be too much. Every so often James catches him doing it and each time he's given a warning look, which he ignores, until all of a sudden he can do so no longer.

Will had been doing push-ups, which he stops the moment he hears the door unlock. It's not the right time for a meal and there isn't enough laundry built up to justify that, and so Will backs up, near the shattered window, wary.

There is something in his captor's hand, an object shaped vaguely like a firearm but chunkier, parts of it bright yellow. "I told you to stop," James sighs, taking a step forward.

You didn't tell me shit, Will bites back. But he hadn't. James had simply looked at him like it should have been obvious, an unspoken law of this basement. "Okay." Will raises his hands, trying to placate the man. "Sorry, okay. I get it. You didn't make it clear enough."

The barb was a push too far. James raises the taser and points it at Will, stepping closer, enough to hit him with it when he pulls the trigger. "I really think I did."

Before he can even begin to reply a sharp pain hits him and then every muscle in his body seizes painfully. Will drops to the ground, unable to keep himself up, pain ripping through his body. It's like nothing he's ever experienced. It's not pleasant, not like the warm piercing sensation when Hannibal bites him, or the floaty fading away when he is strangled. The pain freezes him in place and makes him feel like his entire body is about to pop and cover the room with blood and viscera.

It's over almost as quickly as it began and Will curls in on himself on the floor, body trembling as his heart races with adrenaline. "Don't make me do that again," James warns him, curt, and takes his leave.

Once his captor locks the door a shadow falls over Will and he turns his head, angling it upwards to see who's standing over him. It's Hannibal. "I suppose that's one thing we won't be able to experiment with later," he comments mildly.

Though the initial pain has vanished, a full-body soreness is taking its place. It's a great deal more pleasant and it's easy to imagine Hannibal's foot on his thigh, pressing downwards, the pain increasing-

"This is unwise." Hannibal removes his foot and steps backwards. "It is possible that you may send mixed signals if you become aroused under his captivity."

Carefully, Will sits up, leaning his back against the wall. His limbs are shaky and he doesn't dare try to stand. "The medication," he begins, ignoring Hannibal's comment. "How long did it say it would take for results to start to show?" That must have been information he'd uncovered when he researched it initially, but he's finding it hard to reach at the moment.

"Two to four weeks. You've been here ten days," Hannibal adds, before Will can think to ask.

"Guess I'll need to start playing nice soon." Leaning into the delusions could be dangerous. Despite that, overwhelming his captor physically is becoming less and less feasible as time goes on, leaving only that route available to him. With a sigh, Will closes his eyes. "I can't ask you to stay, can I."

He can see Hannibal just as clearly, and the way he shakes his head sends a pang of longing through him. "Others would be safer."

"I don't want safety," Will says quietly. "I want to go somewhere else."

“We cannot.” The words are closer, right next to his ear, and Will shivers. “You must be patient, my dear.”

Will smiles, joyless. “I’ve always been bad at that.” When he opens his eyes, Hannibal is nowhere in sight. Though he may not physically be here he feels a presence, a darkness pressed up against him. “You’ll find me, won’t you?”

“I will certainly try,” Hannibal’s voice echoes through the emptiness, and Will pulls his knees up to his chest and once more closes his eyes.

Playing nice might be the most difficult thing Will has ever had to do.

He starts small. Another week goes by and Will remains cold, but not hostile, ceasing his petty resistances and simply doing nothing in their place. Two and a half weeks into his confinement he starts responding in short, clipped sentences, gradually increasing the length of their conversations until they can finally be called as much. James shares secrets with him and Will returns the favor, spinning pretty little lies that the man wants to hear, uncovering fragments of a relationship fraught with violence and repression. He stops fighting back, ignoring the way every single cell in his body is screaming at him not to do so.

It’s a safe bet by now that the cameras have no audio because Will spends most of his time in conversation with phantoms. Beverly makes frequent appearances, followed by the rest of his coworkers, even Jack. The other victims come to speak to him at times, always nonsense, stories about the lives he thinks they may have had before they were so cruelly cut short. Sometimes his dogs appear just to listen.

Sometimes, it’s Hannibal. He never stays long because if he did, Will would never let him go.

Most of the time he’s left alone in the basement and James starts bringing him books as rewards for good behavior. They’re all sappy romance novels and Will almost would rather sit alone with his thoughts and ghosts instead, but they’re a good distraction when his mind turns towards dangerous places.

When he’s neither reading nor talking, he plans.

It takes some build-up to pull off. When James comes down he makes sure he’s caught looking wistfully towards the window, reacting like he’s surprised to have been caught, never brings it up himself. He lays the bait and waits.

Eventually, James takes it.

“You miss the forest, don’t you?”

Will makes himself hesitate. “I… do,” he softly admits. “It’s where I would always go when things got to be too much. It’s… comforting. The trees, and the silence.”

The scent James made up for him included ‘forest’- annoyingly vague, now that he thinks about it- which should help lend credence to his claims. He’s frowning slightly, thinking hard on something, but frustratingly, it passes. He changes the subject.

Still, Will is patient. He’d always been a good fisherman.

So he sits in the basement, freezing, waiting. Since the bars were immovable the glass had never been replaced, the cold air left as a punishment, one that had gradually morphed into a reward. With the window gone he can smell the forest, or at least James thinks he can. Will can’t really smell shit. He’d eventually been given a heater, and it helps, but it’s not enough. He can’t risk complaining. He needs the window open.

A week later, the waiting pays off.

James comes into the basement with a broad smile, looking quite proud of himself. “I think you’ve earned yourself a reward.”

Will’s heartbeat goes double time. He smiles right back, grateful. “I- thank you.” He doesn’t ask what the reward is.

The man produces a key and unlocks the cuff. “You said you missed the forest, right? We can go outside, for a little bit.”

“Really?” The excitement in his voice isn’t entirely fabricated. “Are you sure?”

“I’ve thought it over and yes, I’m sure. I can’t trust you enough to let you out unsupervised yet, but I can trust you enough for this.”

James holds out his hand and Will swallows back down the nausea and takes it. He’s led up the stairs and pays very close attention to the layout of the house, what little of it he sees before he’s guided out the front door and into the clearing the cabin sits in.

The suspicions he had from what he could see out of the window are confirmed. Wherever they are, it’s deep and remote, and just breaking into a full sprint right now is overwhelmingly likely to end with him dying in the forest, never to be found again. So he lets himself marvel at the trees, close his eyes and inhale deeply, letting the frigid air fill his lungs.

All he’s wearing are sweats and a loose t-shirt, so he doesn’t have to fake the shiver. “Oh, I’m so sorry!” James sputters. “Wait right there.”

Amazingly, he ducks back into the house and leaves Will out here alone. He barely moves, just far enough to see around the side of the house where his window is. He can see his goal concealed beneath the wild grass, flung so far that James had missed it.

He balls his hands into fists and hates how weak it feels. Even with a weapon, he’s not sure he could overpower anyone like this. And there’s still the tiny issue of the gun. While he doesn’t really ever see it, he’s not stupid enough to think it’s not somewhere James can easily reach if needed.

His captor runs back out with a long-sleeved sweater. Perfect. “You must be cold! Please, put this on.”

“Thank you.” He does, and rather than being baggy this one is barely too large and has clearly been worn before. It’s obviously James’s and wearing it makes him itch, makes his skin crawl, but he needs it. “It’s so beautiful out here.”

“It is, isn’t it?” James moves to stand beside him and Will toys with the sleeves of the sweater, judging the elasticity of the cuffs. It opens easily when he spreads his fingers and springs back into shape when he relaxes his hands.

Will walks through the clearing, around the side of the house. It would make sense that he wants to see the larger picture he’s been gazing at this whole time. James is a step behind him and he can feel the man’s eyes on his body. “I think we can get you back on three meals, soon.”

It’s said so sweetly, like it’s something laudable and not the returning of a basic human right. Like he should be happy that he’s earned the right to not be slowly fucking starved. “I’d like that,” he says, choking back the rage welling up within him. He’s close, almost there, needs to make sure he’s in the right spot- “I-”

Will stumbles and falls, catching himself on the ground with his palms. James hurries over but in the split second before he gets there, Will slides a jagged, sharp shard of broken glass down the sweater sleeve, careful not to cut himself on it as he does so.

“Oh no, baby, are you okay?”

The endearment makes him shudder, disgusted. “S-Sorry,” he says, voice shaky, letting James help him back up. “I’m not used to walking around.” He’d forced himself to be static, unwilling to test the boundaries of what he was allowed when the penalty for breaking them was so severe.

He doesn’t need to walk when he’s just a fucking trophy, after all.

“It’s okay,” James says, gently. “Let’s get you back inside before you hurt yourself. We can go out again later.”

Will nods, despite the fact that all his instincts are *screaming* at him not to let himself be taken back down there. Listening to his instincts right now is a great way to get killed. “Okay,” he says quietly, all false disappointment. “Okay.”

He holds the sweater tightly on his body so James doesn’t even think about trying to take it back and as expected, the man’s eyes flash with possessiveness at seeing Will so comfortable in his clothes. He’s allowed to keep it, wearing it back down into the basement as the cuff is secured back on his leg, and then James goes back upstairs to prepare dinner.

The glass is heavy in his sleeve. He did it. It’s not much, but he finally has a weapon. All that’s left is waiting for the right moment to use it.

Despite the act of warming up to him James never lets down his guard. He's so cautious it's frustrating, rarely getting physically close to Will despite the obvious desire to do so. The closest he gets is dropping off trays of pitifully small amounts of food, barely enough to keep Will alert through the day.

At least he gets three of them instead of two, now.

The other time James gets close is to shave Will, and attacking the man with a razor to his throat is a spectacularly poor idea. No matter what Will does to lure the man closer nothing seems to work. The fact that James's magic Alpha powers don't seem to be affected by all the nonexistent Omega pheromones Will would theoretically be putting out should be enough to clue the man in to some part of his grand delusion not quite adding up, but if the man had been vulnerable to cognitive dissonance Will probably wouldn't even be here in the first place.

Will spends a lot of time thinking about Hannibal, now. He misses him, and the force of how keenly he does was entirely unexpected. Every so often his hand drifts up to the bite on the back of his neck, tracing the scar. Sometimes he thinks about what it would be like if it was Hannibal keeping him down here and not James, and a little thrill runs through him. It's a dangerous path to go down. With Hannibal, he can trust him, knowing it would just be a game. A dangerous game, but a game nonetheless. All he feels in this basement right now is a poisonous mixture of fear and revulsion.

He knows he can die. That's a very present possibility. Nothing about the thought excites him. He wants to *live.*

The sweet words are getting to him. Pretending to be amenable doesn't make the rage and disgust vanish or even fade in the slightest. All it means is he no longer has an outlet. Exercising is off the table, trashing the place would be incredibly suspicious, and attacking James again would lose his trust forever. The only thing left to Will is closing his eyes and imagining.

Hannibal stands beside him, ready, waiting. "How would you do it?" Will asks, voice barely more than a whisper. The answer is always different.

"Falling down the stairs is likely to result in a spinal injury, partial paralysis if we're lucky. He'd be helpless to stop what comes next. A hammer would do nicely, I think. He'd watch as every strike fragments bone. It would take longer for the larger bones, such as the femur, multiple hits around the width of the limb. The pelvis and ribs would be obstructed by muscle and fat, harder to reach. More force would be required. The trickiest part would be shattering the bone without rupturing the organs in the process. An interesting challenge. The limbs would go first, then, to make sure he is conscious to see as much of his body turned to powder as can be realistically achieved."

James puts his hand on Will's shoulder and Will makes himself smile, shy, and not shake him off. When he leaves Will closes his eyes and asks again. "How would you do it?"

"There is good reason animals are typically skinned dead. It is a difficult process, and one wrong motion can tear the hide in twain. He would need to be bound to stop him from struggling. Perhaps in that folding chair he often uses. The first hide would likely be destroyed by his thrashing, needing to be written off entirely. Someplace less desirable to start, then. His hands. A cut around the wrist to start, then I would slide the scalpel under the skin, only enough to get my fingers under it. Then I would pull. There would be resistance, of course. I imagine the noises he would make would be quite unfortunate. The chair may end up knocked to the floor. I could brace my foot on his chest as I pulled until the skin began to give way, peeling up over his hand, allowing me to get a better hold on it. Everything would become easier from there. Once the skin on his hand has been removed like a glove, he would be much stiller, and far easier to skin."

James compliments Will, how slender he has become. When he leaves Will closes his eyes. "How would you do it?"

"Surely there is a pair of pliers somewhere in the building. Jaw pliers would be preferable, though any sizable pair could work. He would need to be bound for this as well. I would force his mouth open, clamp the pliers onto one of his incisors, starting from the bottom jaw, and remove it. There would be a shallow bowl to collect the teeth. I would need to work quickly and carefully, extracting his teeth without damaging the roots. It would not do to have him drown in his own blood so I would need to pull his head forwards regularly, draining the blood into his lap. Once all 32 have been removed, I would collect them in the bowl and pour them back into his mouth, covering it so he may not spit them out. Eventually he will be forced to swallow. It will be interesting to see what kills him first; suffocating around the mass in his throat, or the blood flooding his lungs as his esophagus is torn to tatters."

The way James looks at him is sickening. Demeaning. It makes his skin crawl.

"Thumbs in the eyes, pressing until they pop. Simple and effective."

He still pretends to scent him, mouth open, inhaling deeply.

"If I told him I would spare him if he ate his own nose and tongue, he would be foolish enough to try."

Will's false words make him smile, a twisted, curling thing.

"A Glasgow smile may be a tad overdone."

"I don't care," Will snaps. "I want you to do it."

"Why not do it yourself?"

Abruptly, Will opens his eyes, lips curled back in a grimace. Even he himself does not believe the paper-thin excuse he's built into these fantasies. Hannibal is his blade, he tells himself. Hannibal is violent, destructive, vengeful. If he gets to James before anyone else it

will be a spectacular end for the man. All Will is doing is simply imagining the possibilities, the ways Hannibal may carry out his punishment. His plans. His fantasies.

But they're not Hannibal's fantasies, a shadowy figure whispers to him, even when Will turns away. *They're yours.*

The longer he's down here, the more blurred that line becomes. If he spared the time to think about it he may realize that it never even existed in the first place.

As if to counterbalance his fantasies, he's even kinder to James, more receptive. He greets him with a smile and engages him in enthusiastic conversation. Nearly manic. He overdoes it and he can see James grow suspicious of him. The veneer of a blossoming relationship becomes equally false on both ends. They're cautious of each other, wary of what the other may be planning, keeping up the farce as the days wear on. Someone has to strike first, and it has to be Will.

Though he knows how important this is, Will cannot stop himself from being anxious, terrified his only advantage will be discovered and stripped from him. Terrified of being left truly defenseless. His fingers often run over the hiding place, nervous, and one day James catches him by surprise and Will quickly slams the pillow back onto the mattress, eyes wide.

James stops, eyes narrowed. "Will," he says, a warning tone in his voice. "Have you done something?"

"No," Will protests, frantic. "I swear, nothing-"

"Get off the bed."

Will scrambles off it, backwards, shaking. "I didn't do anything, I promise."

James pats down the bed, ripping off the sheets. His hands reach the pillow and Will can't stop the "No!" that escapes him.

There's a moment of hesitation but then James is yanking the pillowcase off, sending something clattering to the floor. He leans down to pick it up, a look of disappointment on his face. "You've been so good, Will," he sighs.

A metal fork sits in his hand.

"I'm sorry," Will rushes out. "I was just afraid you'd try to take silverware away from me and I didn't want to-"

"Will." It's meant to be harsh, intimidating, but it's a weak shadow of what Hannibal could do. Will lets it silence him regardless. "I can't let this slide."

"No," Will sobs, choked off. "No, I'm sorry, *please-"*

James ignores his begging. He takes away the bed frame and the sheets and Will has to sleep on the bare mattress directly on the floor, a naked pillow to rest his head on. He gets to keep the duvet so he doesn't freeze at night. He curls up on the mattress, trembling, crying

crocodile tears as he feels for the slit in the mattress just along a seam. He dips his fingers inside and feels the glass, safe and sound.

It will be quite a while before James thinks to be suspicious again. The performance should have been more than convincing enough, and would also serve to ingratiate him to his captor once more. All he was terrified of was being found with a tool he should not have had. Nothing malicious, no intent to harm. He has to eat with his hands from then on but the indignity barely registers.

He stops counting the days at some point.

Consciously, at least. There's a calendar somewhere in the back of his mind with days slowly being crossed off, a running tally he can't bring himself to examine. It gets to be too much if he thinks too hard about it.

Frustratingly, a major change means James spends almost all of his time here now. He'd come thumping down the stairs one day, an expression of fury on his face, and for a split second Will worried that he'd done something to incur yet another punishment. It hadn't been too long since his captor had found the fork but things had been healing, creeping back to where they'd been before, and Will was frantically sifting through all their interactions when James finally opened his mouth and told him himself.

"They're after me. One of my alibis flipped."

For a brief, wondrous moment, Will feels relief. They know who has him, they know enough to try and arrest him, they're close-

But James keeps speaking. "None of them know about the cabin, of course. Not stupid enough to have it under my own name or get followed here." The scowl softens, morphs into a smile. "Don't worry, baby. They'll never find us here. We get to spend more time together, this way."

It almost physically hurts Will to force himself to smile.

He knows Jack. He knows they'll think of the woods. He also knows they'll exhaust every other option before trying to comb through such a vast area in the hope of finding the single cabin they're looking for. If the cabin was built illegally, they'd have no chance at all. Escape is likely his only option.

It's not simple. There are endless complications, all of which could be fatal. He only has one shot at trying to kill James and if he does it only to find that the man doesn't have the key on him, he'll simply starve to death down here instead. When he's allowed outside it's always spontaneous, unpredictable, and if he had the glass on him at all times in anticipation of such a situation the chances of it being discovered are extremely high.

With how far into a corner he's being backed, that could be the last straw that finally makes James snap.

So he eats his paltry meals, he listens to James complain about how unfair his life has been, how his parents never loved him, every cliche in the book. When James finally leaves him alone he closes his eyes and talks to Hannibal.

It's always him now. Everyone else faded away at some point, maybe because he stopped pretending he wanted to talk to anyone other than Hannibal. He can easily conjure the image of the Alpha, dressed in a crisp and gaudy suit, sitting in the chair James usually takes for himself. All of his mannerisms are perfectly lifelike and accurate. The conversation is the hard part. Hannibal calms him, talks him down from his anger and frustration, but every time he asks him what to do Hannibal simply looks at him and tells him "Only you can decide that for yourself, Will."

He can't tell if it's because he can't figure out what Hannibal would have said- the man's always been oddly opaque to him, after all- or if it's just a reflection of his own indecision.

His dreams are no more intelligible. Feelings, colors, indecipherable blurs that slip away as quickly as they came. But there is one he remembers, vividly.

It starts familiar. The dark forest, the empty sky, the crack of something breaking beneath his feet. Ahead of him are two red points of light and behind him, only silence. The wolves are gone. This time he walks forward, towards whatever waits for him. This time he won't run away.

They never seem to get any closer. Moving through the forest is slow in total darkness, his hands in front of him to feel for trees and other obstacles, bark rough and painful beneath his hands. It starts to feel like an illusion. Is this where he's meant to be? Endlessly chasing something he will never reach? It's fruitless, and yet he cannot stop.

Will reaches out and makes contact with another tree, this time smooth, and before the difference registers something grabs him by the wrist and spins him around, slamming his back against what seems to be an actual tree, based on the scrape of bark against his bare skin. He can feel it cutting into him, rubbing his skin raw, tiny beads of blood welling up at the contact. The hand on his wrist moves to his neck, holding him in place no matter how much he struggles. Through the darkness Will can barely make out the creature's shape. It seems vaguely human, tall and gaunt, antlers branching up from the sides of its skull. A predator, yet despite the way it has him trapped, Will does not feel fear. If anything, a thrill runs up his spine.

The creature's other hand, tipped in wickedly sharp claws, lays on Will's chest. His breath and heart alike both stutter. Claws curl inwards, cutting red lines into his skin, then the hand pulls back, surrounds his heart with the sharp points of its talons, then plunges inwards.

Will gasps as the creature dips into him. He can feel the claws piercing flesh, organs, feels blood leaking into his lungs from the furrows it has carved. Fingers curl around his heart, slicing what's inside of him without a second thought. They tighten on the organ and pull. Will blinks; one moment the hand is buried in his chest, and the next he sees his heart held

gently in the creature's grip, outside his body. He still feels his heartbeat, sees it flutter weakly and feels his pulse matching pace. Dumbfounded, he looks down, into the bloody crater in his torso. How can he feel it still, beating outside his body?

The fingers around his neck loosen and trace down his neck, balling into a fist before sliding into the void in his chest. When the fingers abruptly straighten instead of feeling them cut through his body Will feels them taking root, slithering along his veins, invading deep into his body. The hand pulses, starting up a rhythm, beating in place of the stolen heart. “Why?” Will gasps, hands flying up to grip the wrist vanishing into him. He can feel the blood cycling out of him, pumped through the hand and into something else, darker, viscous, tarry. It’s replacing him, revealing him. Blood runs out of his mouth, down his chin, and he doesn’t need to look to see that it’s as pitch black as the being before him. His flesh knits together, safely enclosing his new heart. Everything burns as the excuses are purged out of him.

All he can do is watch as the creature tips its head, as if to ask *why do you even feel the need to ask?* It raises his false heart to its lips, jaw splitting open to reveal irregular, needle sharp teeth, tongue sliding out to wrap around the useless organ and pull it close to-

When he wakes up from the dream with a fever instead of a scream, Will almost feels relieved.

There’s an undercurrent of worry and distress, since he knows he’s seriously ill. If he focuses on that he can shake the dream, the sense of being tainted, transformed. Whatever the sickness does to him could be extremely dangerous without Hannibal around to care for him. Despite this, he’s constantly at risk of dying in this situation anyways, so he hopes it will at the very least spare him from the insufferable company of his captor. Maybe he’ll have to leave to try and get medicine and someone will spot his car in town. Maybe this is a good thing, and means salvation is right around the corner.

When James comes down to the basement and sees him, flushed and sweating, the look in his eyes instead makes Will’s blood run cold.

“No,” he says, weakly, a protest of something that hasn’t even begun yet. This doesn’t fit his profile, none of the bodies had any indication of this sort of abuse-

“Oh, isn’t this fantastic news!” James proclaims. “See, I knew you’d get better!” He closes his eyes, opens his mouth to mimic scenting the air, but it’s wrong, it’s all wrong, everything is wrong.

“I’m sick,” Will tries to explain. “It’s a fever.”

“Don’t be modest.” James opens his eyes and approaches him quickly, easily catching him before Will can scramble backwards off the mattress. “I can smell it on you.”

“No,” he croaks, fingers scrabbling on the mattress, where’s the rip, where’s the fucking tear, he can’t even reach the edge-

“There’s nothing to be afraid of.” James catches his wrists. “I know sex must be a scary thing for you. You don’t have to be afraid. I’ll take good care of you.”

“Please,” Will begs him, rapidly running out of options. “Please, don’t. This isn’t like you.” It’s not, he’d had him pegged as the type to wait for marriage, for the bond to form. He hadn’t raped any of the Omegas.

But the Omegas must have fought till the bitter end, hostile and unwelcoming. Will had been kind, understanding, smiled sweetly and blushed when he’d worn the man’s sweater. The fact that it had all been fake didn’t matter. He invited the man, invited this.

It was his fault.

“I’ll be gentle,” James tells him, black smoke pouring out of his mouth. It’s choking Will, making him gag. “You’ll enjoy this,” he lies, poisonous.

The world goes hazy and Will shuts his eyes and goes someplace else.

The river outside his house had always calmed him. He liked fishing there, dogs running to and fro along the riverbank, water rushing against his waders. The frigid current helps him focus, narrows his world down to his line bobbing in the water, his feet planted steady in the ground. It’s second nature to him. He can let the line float and empty his head of all the thoughts crowding inside.

Sometimes thoughts don’t go quietly. *Still having trouble? That’s fine, some people just have trouble. Nothing to worry about. There are solutions, after all.* His hands tighten on the pole and he screws his eyes shut, counts to one hundred until the voice fades away.

Even when it’s angry, the river still calms him. It’s toeing the line of what’s safe and what’s too dangerous to be out here but the fish get kicked up like this, just as active and alive as the waters themselves. He knows his dogs on the shore will warn him if the storm seems like it’s going to turn but for now the rain is light, the cold seeping into his bones in a way that steals his attention, lets him concentrate on that chill and nothing else. The line sways back and forth, fishing pole secure in his grip. He knows he won’t drop it. A shiver runs through him as he empties his mind, one thought stubbornly refusing to scatter-

Don’t cry, baby, you’re doing so well.

He sees shadows in the trees on the other side of the bank.

The river calms him. He can hear his dogs barking along the shore, the current is pulling against his waders, the water trying to unseat him. It’s cold, biting, the rain pounding down in freezing sheets, his line being whipped to and fro in the rushing waters. No fish will bite like this and he feels his feet slip along the ground. The water grips him harder, tries to drag him under, but he keeps his feet underneath him, despite the tendrils wrapping up his legs, despite the pain as the water hisses against his bare skin, despite the dark figure he sees waiting on the shore, just out of reach, too far to help, the river calms him, the river calms him-

The water pulls him under and Will opens his mouth in a soundless scream, lets the water fill his lungs and drown him.

Will, unfortunately, wakes.

It's late afternoon. He's dirty. Tears were left to dry on his face and his entire body is tacky with sweat, and-

He stands, walks to the shower, and scrubs himself until his fingers bleed. Numbly, he redresses, and is hit with the sudden force of the realization that he has reached his limit.

It's been sixty-two days since he was taken.

He sits back down on the mattress, closes his eyes, and talks to Hannibal.

"I'm finished," he tells his mate. "It's over."

"Then why not choose the finale yourself?" Hannibal has one leg crossed over the other, hands folded elegantly in his lap. "Your weapon can serve many purposes."

He opens his eyes and leans over to the side of the mattress, ignoring the way the movement makes his head throb. He pries apart the cut and pulls out the shard of glass. After staring at it, he holds it in one hand, and lets the sharp edge rest on his wrist, just for a moment.

"No," he murmurs. "Not like that."

"I find myself agreeing," Hannibal tells him, and Will looks up with a jolt. He's next to him on the bed now, looking just as carefree as before.

He knows it's not real but it doesn't stop the relief from flooding through him at the sight.

"Then what's your plan? I kill him, then likely starve down here?"

"No." Will pulls the glass away but his hands are shaky and he nicks himself, blood welling up on the side of his wrist. Beside him, Hannibal's gaze snaps to the blossoming red.

A last, desperate hope starts to form.

"You're looking for me," he begins, and Hannibal's eyes meet his.

"Of course."

He glances outside. "It's not evening yet. It will still be light for several hours. You're looking, right now, probably in the forest."

"It's very likely," Hannibal agrees.

"How far away could you smell me from?"

"It depends on many factors." Hannibal eyes the blood again. "The fluid, the amount, the wind, among other things. Blood is the most potent."

Will stands, walks to the window, sees the way the branches of the trees move in the wind. A scent could be carried far, if he got lucky. “A lot of blood,” he says to himself, softly. He turns the glass shard in his hands.

“It would be quite the gamble.”

“I’m not strong enough anymore to wait for better odds. Either the sickness will take me or my captor will.”

“I see.” Hannibal looks almost morose when he turns back to the vision of him sitting in the chair once more.

When Will smiles at the illusion it’s hollow. “You’ll find me, won’t you?”

“I will.” It almost makes Will feel worse.

The real Hannibal would never promise something he couldn’t guarantee. “If you don’t,” Will says, voice quiet. “I’m sorry, okay? That I didn’t realize how you felt sooner.”

“This will not be the end.” Hannibal’s voice is firm and he stands, startling Will. “He will suffer.”

It’s vicious, in character, but not what this Hannibal would have said right now. It’s not acting as expected, almost like-

He forcibly severs the thought before it can progress. False hope does him nothing. This plan, this last hail mary, it will either buy him freedom or it’ll sign his death warrant.

With Hannibal watching he gathers discarded clothes and sheets, anything that quickly absorbs fluid. He half-heartedly arranged them into something resembling a nest to try and fool James for just a moment longer. When they’re piled together he presses the sharp edge of the glass to his other palm and cuts, deep and quick.

Blood starts flowing immediately and he pulls the fabrics to him, walking quickly to the window. He holds them against his palm for as long as he feels like he can afford and then stuffs them through the window, throwing them across the grass, scattering them. He can hear screeching and rapid footsteps upstairs, cabinets thrown open as James searches for a first aid kit. Good. It will slow him down. Once the blood soaked items and the glass itself are strewn outside Will runs back, strains against his bindings until his fingers brush against the chair, barely able to grab and pull it towards him. He runs back to the window, stands up on the chair, and sticks his bleeding hand out through the bars and holds it high, letting his blood drip onto the grass.

James comes thundering down the stairs. “What are you doing?” He cries, expression caught between distress and anger. “You stupid bitch!”

Hands on his shirt pull him backwards, battering his arm on the bars before throwing him back onto the mattress. A fist raises up and collides with his stomach with bruising force. Weakly, Will tries to raise his arms to defend himself, but the blows keep coming, the man’s

face contorted with rage. “Why?” he screams. “Even you? You’re no better than the rest! I thought you were different!”

“Stop, *please,* ” Will yelps, and surprisingly, it does.

James staggers back off of him like he can’t believe what he just did. Will rolls onto his side, chest heaving, leaving a bloody handprint on the mattress. His entire body hurts and it’s so hard to even think.

Hannibal still watches, standing by the window, a puppet at the ready for its master to return.

Shaking, James backs away, muttering to himself before finally fleeing back up the stairs. The door is slammed and locked behind him.

“Please treat that wound,” Hannibal asks him, and Will realizes the first aid kit had been left in the basement with him.

Will spits blood onto the concrete. His lip is split and he can feel one of his eyes swelling shut. “Does it matter?”

“It would matter to me.”

Silently, Will opens the first aid kit and wraps the cut on his hand the best he can. Very little in the kit is sharp, just a needle and a small pair of fabric scissors. It will have to do. Maybe he’ll be able to reach the glass he threw outside again.

He closes the kit, lays back down on the mattress, and stares at the ceiling as he waits.

Less than an hour later he hears a car screech to a halt outside the cabin and he sits bolt upright.

No, he tells himself. *Don’t get excited.* If it’s not Jack he needs to find a way to make noise, to alert the arrival to his presence in the basement. The chair would work, but when he stands, his vision spins and he collapses back onto the mattress.

The wound on his hand is still bleeding and he’s light-headed. A thunderous crash echoes through the house from upstairs. Muffled, he can hears James- “Who the fuck-”

Then all he hears is a gunshot, and a scream.

Hannibal, his heart tells him. *He found me.*

More crashing, getting closer, and suddenly the door to the basement buckles inwards and collapses. A human form bounces down the stairs and lands crumpled at odd angles on the bottom. Holding his breath, Will looks upwards.

All he sees is darkness. A vaguely human-like shape descends the stairs, slow and methodical, rolling over the limp figure with a foot. The body twitches. Pitch black hands reach for the man, tipped in razor sharp claws, and there is a sickening crunching noise. The

creature opens its mouth to reveal razor sharp teeth and now he hears a tearing, the wet squelch of blood and guts.

The breath leaves him, loud and fast, and the figure looks up at him, deep empty sockets where the eyes should be, a pinprick of red in the center. Will can feel his consciousness fading, overheating and dissolving. It turns towards him just as Will's eyes roll back up into his head and everything goes white.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

> This is where things get weird. It's also the last chapter! It might seem like I slowly lost my mind at this point, but the weirder portions of this were actually some of the first ideas I had for this sequel. I basically had to work backwards to justify them.
>
> Hannibal also does one of the worst things I've ever made him do here, so please mind the tags.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next time he wakes everything is bright, so bright and noisy, a constant beeping and the thrum of machines. Had James moved him? There are tangles of lines attached to him, choking him, and he pulls at them, tries to pry them off, hears people-

-removing the-

-sedate-

“No,” he tries to croak, and nothing comes out, and then he’s sinking back into unconsciousness.

He only finds out later that he spent the better part of a week like this, incoherent, fading in and out as he fought a dangerously high fever while he was already weak and malnourished. All he remembers is an endless nightmare and then one day, suddenly, he wakes up.

It’s still too bright. The beeping and hums are familiar now, sounds he’s heard many times visiting victims, and he realizes he’s in the hospital.

He’s too exhausted to cry with relief, but he wants to.

Will tries to sit up. Someone helps him, a firm grip, and for a second all he can think is *Hannibal, it’s Hannibal, he’s here, he saved me-*

He turns his head and sees Jack.

“Can you hear me?”

Something in his behavior must have changed because Jack helps him sit up without a second of hesitation. “Hannibal,” he rasps. It feels like every ounce of strength he possessed has been drained from his body.

“It’s Jack.”

He must have been pretty delirious if that's the reaction he's getting. "I know. Where is he?" Hannibal would be here with him, he should be here, it makes no sense that he isn't, unless. Unless.

Jack looks away and Will feels like his stomach is splitting open. "You can't see Hannibal."

"No," Will whispers. He remembers the fight but not how it ended, had James gotten him with the gun after all, there had been so much blood-

When Jack looks back he immediately curses. "Will, no, I didn't- fuck, I'm sorry. He's fine. You just can't see him because he's under house arrest, and because of the upcoming trial."

Will closes his eyes and lets reality sort itself out, breathing a huge sigh of relief. But the questions soon flood him. "What trial?"

"Do you remember anything from when you were rescued?" Jack winces. "I'm not here as part of my job. I'm not questioning you."

Looking down, Will shakes his head. "Not much, and I was hallucinating during it. There was a fight. It has to have been Hannibal but I didn't… see him."

Jack nods. It takes him a while to answer. "The day we found you… We were looking at cabins in Washington and Jefferson. Hannibal became extremely agitated sometime in the afternoon, then ran off hours later. Only reason we found him was because he sent me the coordinates before breaking in himself." He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath before continuing. "When we got there… there was so much blood, and the way he was holding you- we thought you were dead."

Will looks down at his arms. There is still bruising on them, from the last time James had gone down to the basement. "I take it the blood came from neither of us."

"Some of it was yours. We had to sedate him to separate you. Later, when he had calmed down, he told me you had had a seizure."

Hands tighten in the scratchy hospital sheets. "A seizure," Will repeats, numbly.

"You had some sort of brain inflammation." Jack leans back in his chair and rubs his forehead, clearly exhausted. "It's been treated, and you shouldn't have any other lasting effects. They want you to stay in the hospital for a while."

The thought of being trapped here makes his skin crawl. "I want to go home."

"I know you do." Jack meets his gaze, and the look in his eyes makes Will realize he's not getting out of this. "They want to make sure you gain back the weight safely, and that there are no complications because of the drugs you were forced to take."

That's not all of it. It's not even most of it. Both of those things could be done as an outpatient. "What's the real reason, Jack?"

They've worked together long enough that Jack knows better than to try to lie to Will, and also knows telling him the truth is usually the best way to get him to cooperate anyways. So he tells him all of it. "Hannibal brutalized the man who took you. He's going to be on trial for murder. We barely got him to agree to house arrest, and only because you're safe here. In the hospital. If you went home he'd immediately break out to get to you and it'd make things much worse for him."

Will blinks. "Murder? He saved me."

"He also used violence far beyond the point of need."

His mind is racing. "Defending a mate is a common way to dodge a murder charge. He has a history of violent instinctual behavior. Why is he being charged?"

Jack looks at him like he can't believe Will is making him say it out loud. "Because you're a Beta, Will. You may be mates but none of the instinctual behavior that comes from mating applies here. The best he could swing is crime of passion, and even that carries jail time."

With a sinking feeling, Will realizes Jack is right. For the first time in his life, Will regrets that he's a Beta. "I don't-" He grits his teeth. "This is ridiculous. I want to see him, Jack. I *need* to see him. It's- It's considered inhumane to separate mates, right?"

"It's considered inhumane because of the mental bond formed when Alphas and Omegas mate with each other. You *know* that doesn't apply here."

"That's bullshit!"

"What we think doesn't change the law. Look." He sighs. Strangely, Jack then glances around the room, checking to make sure they're alone. "Will, listen to me."

It gives Will pause. "What."

"If you go to see him, unsupervised, every single thing you say will be thrown out in court. Do you understand what I'm telling you?"

To anyone else the comment would seem patronizing, but Will knows Jack is trying to get him to look deeper at his words. If crime of passion was truly being argued then his testimony wouldn't amount to much so it would be irrelevant. There is a similar argument that could be made; something activated Hannibal's Alpha instincts, like a potential threat. Another Alpha. What they're going to argue finally slots into place. Though his captor had been a Beta, he acted like an Alpha, and it may have been enough to make Hannibal lose control in this specific situation.

He *really* fucking hates this, but he'd hate it more if Hannibal went to jail.

Will reroutes the conversation, confirmation enough that he got what Jack was alluding to. "You said… unsupervised."

"I can't promise anything," Jack quickly adds. "It won't be private."

“I don’t care,” Will says quietly. “I just need to see him.”

Stands, Jack nods. “Understood. I’ll make it happen, but it might take a bit. I’ll let the nurses know you’re awake.” Though he walks to the hospital room door, he pauses at the exit. “Will, I… I’m sorry.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“You only met him because-”

“No,” Will interrupts, voice firm. “It’s not your fault. The only person that should be blamed is dead.”

For a long moment, Jack is silent, his back to Will. He finally glances backwards. “Alright. Take care, Will.”

With that, he leaves.

There’s too much to process so Will closes his eyes and lets his thoughts sink away, picturing the steady current of the riv-

He thinks of the ocean. It’s been a while since he’s seen it but he can still clearly picture the sand, the cries of the seabirds, and the sharp scent of salt. It’s overcast in his mind, a white, muted fog, everything so drained of color that it’s hard to believe it’s all real.

It’s what he needs right now.

He watches the ocean until he hears someone enter his room and he opens his eyes, turning his head to see a nurse approaching warily. When he doesn’t attack on sight they seem to relax, even brighten. “How are you feeling?”

Terrible, Will doesn’t say, because that won’t be helpful. “Overwhelmed.”

That doesn’t really help either.

They nod, sympathetic. “I’m just going to do a quick check-up and then I’ll fetch the doctor. Are you in any physical pain?”

He allows the nurse to maneuver him, taking his blood pressure, his temperature, all the basics. “Yes, but nothing severe.”

They nod. “More just aches and soreness? Your temperature has gone back to normal, which is a relief.”

After a moment, he nods. “How long have I been here?”

“Let me see…” The nurse leans back, putting away the supplies. “Today is the… I believe three, maybe four days? Your physical injuries weren’t terrible, thankfully, but we’re more worried about your illness and malnutrition. It looks like we can cross one of those things off the list. We’ll have to run more tests to be sure.” They enter some information into the

computer and then slide the station away. “Doctor Cho should be free, so she’ll probably be in pretty quickly. Anything you want in the meantime?”

“Nothing you can provide,” Will says before he can stop himself. “No,” he corrects. “I’m okay.”

There’s a flicker of pain in the nurse’s eyes, soon replaced by a polite smile. “Of course. If you need anything just hit that button there and we’ll come right away.” They point out the call button before exiting the room.

This pity, this sympathy… it’s hitting Will that he’s going to be experiencing a lot of it, and it’s not something he’s looking forward to.

True to the nurse’s word, barely five minutes later a short woman with long dark hair and a white coat comes into the room, and this time she shuts the door behind her. “Mr Graham, hello. It’s good to see you awake and not attacking any of our nurses.”

Will flinches. “I attacked someone?”

“Water under the bridge. Your fever was, frankly, astonishing, and you clearly didn’t understand where you were.” She works at the computer for a second, making a satisfied noise when she looks at the new information, before pulling up a chair and wheeling it to the side of his bed. “I’m Veronica Cho, your main doctor for your stay. How is your head? Any headaches?”

His hand flies up to his head, like he could physically feel the presence of a headache. “Nothing out of the ordinary.”

Just barely, she frowns. “I’m not a fan of you having chronic headaches either but it sounds like we might be out of the woods. You had Encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain. It was causing the high fevers and I’m sure a whole slew of cognitive symptoms. Have you experienced anything unusual in recent memory?”

“Um.” A brain inflammation? “Hallucinations, mainly. Sleepwalking when I don’t normally. Confusion, disorientation.”

The frown deepens. “Why didn’t you seek medical treatment?”

That’s definitely not something he can share, not if he ever wants to see Hannibal again. “I thought- I thought it was just because of the high fever.”

“Well, I suppose the seizure would have clued you in eventually.” She leans back, crossing her arms. “I’m not going to call it mild but we caught it before it did any irreversible damage. It may be a slow process, but you should make a full recovery.”

“Good,” Will says quietly, staring at the sheets. It feels hollow, for some reason.

The chair wheels away, taking his doctor with it. She’s back on the computer. “We’re going to get you a nutritionist to help you safely gain back the weight you lost. I’m setting you up with a therapist as well.”

“I refuse to see a therapist.”

Hands on the keyboard stop and when the doctor peers around it, she looks irritated. “You’ve been through an extremely traumatic experience. There’s no shame in it.”

“It’s not that.” The sheets wrinkle under his hands, digging into the mattress. “I’ve been to quite a few *therapists* over the course of my life. Every single experience has been worse than the last.”

“This isn’t negotiable.” She vanishes behind the computer once more and he hears more typing, clicking around, and then- “Ah. I see.”

Will doesn’t have to see the screen to know exactly what she’s seen. This is why he hates hospitals. And doctors, especially of the psychiatric kind.

A pang of longing hits him. Hates *most* of them, he corrects.

With a start he realizes she’s standing at the foot of his bed now, watching him with a considering look. “I get why you’re resistant. You went through multiple horrific experiences, and you need someone to help. I can do my best to find someone I think would be a good fit for you.”

“Multiple?” There was the act of being abducted, he supposes, and the serious illness, though he doesn’t think that would be necessarily considered traumatic, but shouldn’t all of that just be lumped together? What could multiple mean?

Ice slowly spreads throughout his body as he realizes. Of course the hospital would know. “Does anyone else know?” he says, whisper quiet.

“Of course not. We don’t go around divulging private medical details to anyone we come across, you know.” Her expression softens. “You don’t have to tell anyone if you don’t want to. Not even the therapist.” A beat of silence. “Might find it helpful to tell your mate’s lawyer, though.”

Will, incredulously, laughs. “His lawyer.”

“Sorry, that was insensitive.”

Insensitive but correct. “It’s fine.”

“It’s not fine though, is it?”

Her gaze is sharp, and Will can’t find it in himself to lie. Slowly, hesitantly, he shakes his head.

“Right. I’ll get you set up with someone. For now, all you have to do is rest. How do you feel about visitors?”

“I…” Will closes his mouth, considers. All he wants right now is quiet. “No more for today.”

“Got it. Oh, I almost forgot.” She looks around the room. “Damn. Got no clue where it is. I’ll get the nurse to find it for you.”

Before Will can even ask what she’s referring to, she’s gone,and he can only wonder.

The same nurse ducks back in the room to pull something out of the closet. A heavy bag, full of books from his house, and also- “Hannibal,” he says, hands gripping the plastic bag the items rest in. He must have given Jack a list with his own stack. “Thank you.”

“Your phone is in there as well, though we ask that you keep the calls to a minimum.”

He doesn’t think he’ll be calling anyone. He can’t even muster the courage to turn it on, afraid to see hundreds of missed calls and texts.

He leaves the phone in the bag, forgotten, and tries to read.

The next week feels like it plays out in slow motion.

Someone from the BAU comes to interview him. It’s someone he barely knows, maybe has seen them once or twice at a holiday party, and Will silently thanks Jack for the small kindness. They keep very calm despite the simmering anger beneath the surface, clearly furious at what had happened to Will. It’s almost illogical. They’re strangers. Still, he knows very well that humans are far from logical creatures.

The nutritionist meets with him and he starts eating real meals, packed with calories. A physical therapist helps him start to slowly gain his muscle back, mostly building up his stamina again. Someone asks him if there’s anything specific that he wants, other than the obvious, and he says no at first until his hair falls in front of his face, covering his eyes.

James had liked how his hair was growing longer. He asks for a barber.

They cut his hair short, barely long enough to curl, shorter than it’s ever been since he met Hannibal. There’s no hiding the mating bite on the back of his neck, now. He lets his beard grow in, past stubble, until it’s thick along his jaw. It will be harder to take care of than stubble ever had been but he doesn’t think he can handle having his face bare anymore.

It’s both a surprise and a bit of an annoyance when he’s sent to see a therapist and finds, against all odds, that this might actually work out.

She’s gentle and very deliberately non-threatening, long brown hair and blue eyes, office warm and comforting. It’s all neutral tones and bland artwork on the walls, the chairs plush and comfortable. Her role is mostly passive, allowing Will full control over the conversation, but she does not by any means let him take advantage. While she won’t force him to say anything she also won’t let him deflect and distract, gently peeling away at layers of resistance.

It works because she doesn't *feel* like a therapist, which is probably the entire point. Will is still extremely hesitant but at the very least, he's willing to give it a shot.

Then, almost exactly a week from when he had woken up, Jack visits to tell him that he can finally see Hannibal.

Everything seems just the tiniest bit more bearable after that.

Bringing him to Hannibal's home would be unwise so they bring Hannibal to him. Will sits in a chair at the table in his room, foot tapping impatiently, unable to focus on anything other than the man's imminent arrival. He can't even bring himself to pretend to read a book while he's waiting. If the FBI agent standing by the door thinks he's pathetic, well, he can't really bring himself to care.

He hears footsteps right outside and he perks up, eyes glued to the door. The agent looks to the side, listening to something over his earpiece, then he turns to the door and opens it, and Will's world narrows down to that doorway as Hannibal comes into view.

Will stands, the chair screeching backwards on the floor. "Hannibal," he says weakly, taking a step forward, and then Hannibal is on him so quickly he barely even sees the man move, crushing Will against his body, head pressed against his neck.

"Will." Hannibal's voice is raspy, thick with emotion. "I thought I might lose you."

"You didn't," Will whispers, his words sticking in his throat. "I'm here. I'm okay. You saved me."

Hannibal is inhaling deeply at his neck, breathing in his scent. Will's arms are wrapped around the other man just as tightly and he can't quite pinpoint when that happened. All he's sure of is that if anyone tried to make him let go right now he'd probably try to assault them. On cue, the agent that had come with Hannibal clears his throat, and Will prickles, ready to give them a piece of his mind, but when he looks up they look apologetic and not offended.

Oh. Everything they say needs to be clearly audible so Will's integrity isn't compromised for the upcoming trial.

Despite that his hands tighten, and it's Hannibal that has to pull away, but only far enough to tilt Will's head towards his and then they're kissing. It might not be accurate to call it chaste but it's not particularly scandalous either, and when they separate Hannibal's hand runs through his beard, his eyes moving up to Will's hair. "Sorry," Will says, irrationally.

Almost immediately Hannibal looks perplexed. "Why apologize?" He's speaking louder now, enough that the agents can hear them. "I quite like it, regardless. Though I suppose I would like anything you chose to do."

This is what he missed so terribly. The unconditional acceptance. The obvious love, the affection, the way that Hannibal sees him as a person, an equal, not some decoration. The safety. He hadn't realized how badly he had craved it until it had been torn from his grasp.

It's easy to forget it's coming from a man who had ripped someone to shreds just a few weeks prior.

The smell hits him now, an alluring aroma of roasted meats and eggs, and he notices the satchel over Hannibal's shoulder. "Did you bring food?"

"Of course." Hannibal steps away from him now and it's extremely difficult to stop himself from reaching back out to catch the man and pull him back in. "I've been in contact with the doctor in charge of your diet so I can assure you that it is safe to eat."

"I've missed your cooking," Will admits softly, a tiny smile growing on his face. "I've missed… all of you."

Hannibal's hand clenches and unclenches and he forcefully turns towards the table. "Let us eat," he says, and Will can tell he's fighting the same urge. Will sits, and so does Hannibal, who sets the package on the table and pulls out two warm tupperwares, a thermos, and cutlery.

Will watches, disbelieving, as Hannibal pulls off the top and sets out silverware. "This is…"

"A protein scramble," Hannibal confirms.

It was the first thing Hannibal had ever made for him, back after they had first met, when Will was still guarded and hostile. Hannibal had showed up at his hotel room during a case with food in hand and talked his way inside. That was the first of many things that chipped away at Will's walls. He closes his eyes and inhales the smell of the food. "It smells just as amazing as it did back then."

"I'm afraid it's more meat than eggs this time around."

He's not wrong. It doesn't make it any less delicious, and at the first bite Will feels like it's the best thing he's ever eaten in his life. If he could only pick one thing to eat until he died it would be this. "Tastes even better."

"You were less generous with the compliments before."

Will laughs. It's quiet, quick. "I never could figure out why you did it."

Hannibal's smile is barely there. "Is that not obvious, now?"

"Huh." Will hadn't really thought of it again, but it does seem obvious in retrospect. "I guess it is." He eats more of his meal, savoring the taste. When he speaks again it's soft. "You helped keep me sane down there, you know."

"You spoke to me." Strangely, Hannibal looks like something has just become clearer for him. Almost thoughtful. He doesn't bother to hide the expression.

Will disregards that, instead nodding. "It feels… dismissive, almost, to say this. But there was so much silence. So much time alone, tr-" He cuts himself off. "Alone in a room with nothing to do."

Hannibal's hands tighten on his silverware. "A songbird in a cage."

"I don't like being alone with my thoughts."

"Did you speak to others?"

"At first." Will's gaze is downcast, focused on his food. "It became more difficult to imagine others as time went by. It felt like they were… fading. Only you remained clear."

"I see." There, that expression Will recognizes- Hannibal's figured something out. "What did we talk about?"

"Everything. You gave me the courage to act."

A beat too late, Hannibal's face darkens. "What you did was very dangerous."

"Yeah," Will agrees. "But it worked."

"Hey," one of the agents interrupts. They're getting into dangerous water. "Careful what you talk about."

Hannibal, as expected, looks furious at being interrupted. But that makes something occur to Will and he looks to the agent. "Um, can I ask about the witness?"

The agents look at each other, exchanging hushed words. "The one who recanted the alibi? That should be fine."

He turns back to Hannibal. "That's the one thing I can't wrap my head around. It doesn't make sense. Why suddenly come clean after so long?"

While Hannibal answers, Will eats. "Serendipity. One of the men who had been paid off to supply fake alibis happened to have been an acquaintance of mine."

The words feel off. This isn't what happened. He listens closely, trying to find the true answer beneath the lies.

"We ran into each other by chance, and they could tell how poorly I was doing. When they asked about my health I was honest. It seems that they connected the dots and were so overwhelmed with guilt that they contacted the FBI the following day."

Hannibal doesn't leave things up to chance. Whether or not the person was actually an acquaintance is irrelevant. Hannibal found them and possibly threatened them, though he would have stuck to good old fashioned manipulation if he could have. It took so long because it was either difficult to track them down or difficult to make it look like coincidence. "It all came down to chance."

"Many things often do."

And that's what it comes down to, isn't it? Everything that happened, all the pain and suffering, it was just a path formed by a series of coincidences and chance encounters. It's a

frightening thing to think about, how little control you have over life.

Maybe that's why he's so drawn to Hannibal. If anyone could find a way to control the uncontrollable, it would be him.

"Starting to see why Determinism can be such an attractive philosophy."

It's mostly a joke, and Hannibal pulls an unexpectedly displeased expression. "Attractive, yet utterly foul."

The obvious hatred startles Will, and he laughs. "I can't say I'm a fan myself."

"Some aspects of it can be admittedly enticing," Hannibal admits.

"Oh?"

"There are times I feel as if I was born to meet you."

"Oh," Will repeats, utterly lost as to how to respond. He'd almost forgotten the sheer intensity of Hannibal's feelings for him.

"To be perfectly honest, I am not sure what would have happened to me if you had never been found."

It feels less like Hannibal would have been consumed with sorrow and more like this would have culminated in a bloody rampage ending with suicide by police. "I'd say the same, but I guess in this scenario how I felt wouldn't really be relevant anymore, would it?" Even the distant thought of losing Hannibal makes his stomach twist. He can't even begin to imagine what it must have been like to live with that feeling, possibly worse, for months on end.

"Stop," Hannibal tells him, and Will looks up in confusion. "You get a very particular expression on your face when you are diminishing your own experiences."

A small smile, void of joy. "You really have me figured out, don't you?"

"I don't," Hannibal tells him, a smile on his own face. "And I never will."

One of the agents clears their throat. Their time is up. It had felt like so little, not enough, never enough. "I-" Will stops himself, since admitting to Hannibal that he doesn't want him to leave would only make things harder on them both. "Thank you," he says instead. "For everything."

Hannibal looks at him like he heard the aborted statement anyways. "I do not want to leave you," he says, for the both of them.

"I know," Will says softly. "I don't- you have to. We can't afford to." He stops, restarts. "It's only for a while. This time, you know exactly where I am."

"I'll never lose you again."

It's hard to tell if that's a threat or a promise. Hannibal kisses him goodbye and it lingers, far beyond the time it should, fingers curled tightly around his jaw.

It gets both easier and harder after that. Seeing Hannibal again put a lot of fears and anxiety to rest he hadn't even realized he had, but at the same time it felt like getting the first taste of a drug he was addicted to. The brief reminder of what he'd been deprived of only makes him feel the loss all the more keenly. It's only temporary, he tells himself, and it's voluntary. If you really wanted to you *could* walk out of here and ruin everything just to see him again. It would be a bad idea, sure, but it's still a choice you can make. You're not trapped anymore.

It doesn't stop him from waking some nights in a panic, thinking he's never going to see Hannibal again. That the one connection he finally made, the one person who understands him, will vanish without him being able to do a single thing about it.

He throws himself into his recovery to distract himself. Other people visit him. Beverly visits exactly once before being banned for sneaking Buster into the hospital to see him, somehow. The staff quickly makes it clear that he's free to have his dogs brought to the nearby park and spend some time with them, which becomes a daily part of his routine. Beverly has Buster and Harley while, unexpectedly, Zeller had taken the rest. He looks haggard and worn out but determined to hold onto them for as long as needed.

One meal a day is suddenly and suspiciously much higher quality than the rest, and the nurses are quite open about the fact that it's Hannibal that's cooking them. That little piece of him is a large part of what helps him get through all these endless days. Bit by bit, Will starts to get his stamina back, starts doing basic exercises, and the direction of this path is clear before him. At least physically, he'll be able to get back to normal.

Mentally is a different story. His therapist helps but it's still a slow, tortuous process. Will had never liked physical contact but he rejects it even more harshly now, something that had caught him by surprise considering how readily he had accepted it from Hannibal. Maybe he had been overwhelmed by the moment itself, their reunion. He nearly punched a nurse trying to draw blood from him on reflex. She seemed startled but understanding. Still, he's not ready to talk about it. The therapist never presses him, never rushes. Every so often she reiterates that whenever he is comfortable, she will listen.

She also tells him that he might *never* feel comfortable talking about it, and that's okay too.

The main way he keeps track of the approaching trial is when Hannibal's lawyer comes to speak with him. It's never done without his therapist present. Based on the questions, many about his captor's behavior and Alpha-like mannerisms, it's easy to figure out the argument they're going to use is exactly what Jack had alluded to. Despite being a Beta, if James had postured enough, it may have triggered Hannibal's instincts anyways and made him lose control. He's asked the exact date of their bonding, about Hannibal's violent tendencies when he loses control, about his overprotectiveness and aggression.

The most frustrating part of it all is that if Will had simply been an Omega, none of this would have mattered. An Alpha kills someone who was an imminent threat to their mate and walks away with a slap on the wrist. May as well consider it self defense. But legally, Will could not be considered a mate.

They talk about that in therapy too. It never really quells the fiery rage inside of him.

As expected, he's asked to testify at the trial. The day arrives before Will can even begin to prepare himself for it.

He hates having to wear a fucking suit. It's stuffy and the tie feels like it's choking him, in a way that isn't pleasant.

"I'm asking you again," the man repeats, in a crisp suit of his own. Hannibal's defense attorney. He's tall, well built, has an air of confidence around him, likely an Alpha. Will never asked because it's irrelevant. If he's an Alpha, he's not an obnoxious one.

Except for right now. Will can't be mad *at* him, he's actually being incredibly considerate, and it doesn't seem like it's just because Hannibal asked him to. That's actually probably why he's so irritated. There's nowhere to direct it. "Yes. Of course I'm going to testify."

"Okay." He nods, faintly relieved. Though the man would have had a backup if Will had bowed out at the last minute it would have weakened the case considerably. "If it gets to be too much-"

"It won't." Will sighs. "I get it."

It's not the first time he's been in court. If anyone from their team ends up having to testify as an expert witness, the person that goes varies depending on the need, but it usually ends up being Will. Still, despite the familiar setting, the circumstances are horrifically unique. He's seated in the crowd, in between his therapist and Jack, who will be testifying earlier than him. Hannibal sits next to his attorney in a crisp, dark blue suit, tie a deep maroon. Will tries not to look at him because he's not really sure he could ever stop.

Across the aisle the prosecution is a middle-aged woman, small in stature but holding herself with a strength that shouldn't be underestimated. Her papers are neatly organized, a briefcase set on the table presumably holding more within. Will, irrationally, hates her.

He barely listens to the opening statements. It's exactly what he thought they'd be. The defense is arguing that Hannibal was defending his mate, that instincts took over, while the prosecution argues that that simply couldn't have happened. Witnesses parade through the courtroom, all revolving around that same disagreement, and Will has to distance himself from the procession or else he's going to scream, and he might never stop. Jack testifies about the killer's profile, something that normally would have been Will's job, and Price testifies about the bodies. Scientists come up to testify about their secondary genders, a sociologist comes to discuss Alpha/Beta mating pairs, character witnesses, all of it is a hazy blur until Jack is saying his name and he looks up to see the judge staring at him.

His turn.

He stands, adjusts his tie nervously, and takes the stand.

“Will you be alright to testify, Mr Graham?” the judge asks him, kindly. How humiliating.

“Yes.” He makes sure his voice is firm.

“Very well.” He’s sworn in.

The first question he’s asked isn’t unexpected, but it’s not what he thought he’d get first. “Tell me about Doctor Lecter.”

Will blinks. “You’re going to have to be more specific or else we’ll be here all day.”

There’s no laughter, not in this deadly serious trial, but he can feel the room warm towards him. Smart. “As a mate.”

“Right. Sure.” He has to say this carefully. “Most of the time, he’s kind. Extremely protective, supernaturally considerate. He’d probably lay his jacket over puddles to let me walk on if I let him.”

“And what do you mean by ‘most of the time’?”

“Well.” His fingers tap on the underside of the podium in front of him. “He can lose control. It’s always when instincts take over, like during a rut. He can get violent.”

“Do you ever feel like you’re in danger?”

Yes, Will absolutely cannot under any circumstances say. *That’s the fun part.* “No. I was aware of this going into the relationship, and we take measures to protect ourselves.”

“In your opinion, do you think he would be capable of killing someone in that state?”

This is as far as they’re pushing this line of questioning. “If they were a danger to me? Absolutely.”

“Thank you.” The defense shuffles some papers around, and now they’re getting into the important parts. “I’m going to ask you some questions about James Smith.”

Will nods, more sharply than he intended. “Go ahead.”

“You are aware that the man was a Beta, correct?”

“I am.”

“Did he behave like one?”

“Not at all.”

“Please elaborate.”

“He... knew he was a Beta, but he believed he had all of the abilities an Alpha had. He would call himself special, like he was the next step in evolution. He tried to scent me a lot, thought he had a Voice, and acted exactly like what he believed an Alpha would.”

“How deep would you say these delusions ran?”

“Very. He was convinced I was an Omega and that he could smell my pheromones. Not even basic, easily disprovable factors could convince him otherwise.”

“At the point in the case where you were when you were kidnapped, everyone believed the killer was an Alpha, correct?”

“That’s correct.”

“So when Doctor Lecter entered the cabin, he would have encountered a man everyone believed to be an Alpha, who was acting and posturing as one.”

“Correct.”

“Do you think it could have been enough to trigger his instincts and make him lose control?”

Will swallows. “Easily.”

“And, as you testified before, you think he was capable of killing a man in this frame of mind.”

“Every single previous victim of the killer had turned up murdered, and most were missing for less time than I was. It would have been more surprising if he hadn’t killed him.” He can hear murmurs in the courtroom, soft and brief.

“Thank you, Will.”

The defense sits and the prosecution stands. This is the part he’s not prepared for, and the anxiety starts to take root. “Mr Graham,” she begins, cool and calm. “How well do you know Hannibal Lecter?”

“Intimately.” The word comes out slowly, every syllable a harsh pop of noise. He needs to calm himself down.

“Do you think he would be just as capable of killing someone now, when he’s perfectly in control?”

“No,” Will lies. If this ever comes back to haunt them they’ll have much bigger issues than perjury to deal with.

“You are a Beta, are you not?”

“I am.”

“So even after mating, you cannot feel his emotions, and his mood does not influence yours.”

Just barely, Will halts his hand before his fingers start tapping along the edge of his thigh. "Not in that sense."

"You do not share the same mental bond that other mated pairs do."

"We *can't.* "

"Everything you said was something that *felt* correct but could not concretely be proved. Would you agree with that statement?"

Will's jaw clenches. "I'd call it reductive, but in the general sense, yes."

"Why would you call it reductive?"

"Because actions have made him lose control before."

"Are you referring to the rut you induced in him, before you had mated?"

Just how much information did these people have? He looks at Hannibal, briefly, and all he sees is trust, encouragement. "No."

"Why did you look at Lecter just now?"

"Because it's- embarrassing," he mumbles.

"I would advise you not to lie under oath simply to save you some embarrassment," the judge reminds him.

"Right. Sorry." Will takes a deep breath; he can't exactly back out of this admission now. "It's not the same… emotion. But pretty soon after we mated, in the office. Something fell behind a desk and I had to. Bend over. To get it. Hannibal had to leave the room."

After a beat of silence, the prosecutor clears her throat. "And how recently had you mated before you were kidnapped?"

"Only a couple of weeks."

"Thank you. No further questions."

He's dismissed, and it feels like it was all far too short. Had he helped the case? Had he said enough? Hannibal's entire freedom rides on this, and he can't shake the smothering fear that he's fucked it up somehow.

Then Hannibal himself takes the stand, and Will can't make himself look away.

The questions start out boring, predictable. Asking how long he's had violent tendencies. If he's lost control before Will. About their relationship. The search for him. Then, finally, the day he was rescued.

He knows how this will go. Jack's told him the details before. Hannibal had gotten restless and struck out on his own, and at some point during that he caught Will's scent on the wind and found him. Saved him. "Let's talk about the day Will was rescued." More papers are moved around before the defense continues. "As Mr Crawford testified earlier, sometime in the early afternoon, you became agitated and quickly left despite his protests. What were you doing between then and the time you found Mr Graham?"

"Looking for him."

"Aimlessly?"

"I'm afraid so. Until he cut himself and I could track him more accurately, I only had a general sense of where he was."

Will frowns, and he can tell the defense lawyer wasn't expecting this sort of response either. "You could sense where he was?"

"Not directly, and not before this moment."

"I... see. Can you still do so now?" Hannibal looks into the crowd, as if to say *I don't really need to, do I?* "After he was rescued," the lawyer adds.

"It seems so."

The prosecution is frantically sifting through her own notes. It seems Hannibal has sprung this on them all. But it doesn't make sense. Typical mated pairs have a similar ability, but not… "So you seem to have developed this ability in a time of crisis. Can you think of any reason why?"

"I've likely had it since we mated and simply not noticed, as I always knew where he was. It only became clear because of the intense distress I was experiencing."

"Did it feel like time was running out?"

"Our distress," Hannibal clarifies. "I felt Will's as if it was mine." There's a pervasive chattering throughout the room, because none of what he's saying makes sense. The entire argument hinges on Hannibal not biologically being able to have the abilities he's claiming to have. He would never do something as reckless as blatantly lying on the stand, not in a way that could be very easily disproved, so what the hell is he doing?

"Had you before?"

"No. This was far more intense."

"If you couldn't sense it before, how could you know that this was more severe?"

"Because my mate was being raped," Hannibal answers, adjusting his tie, and the entire courtroom falls dead silent.

Bile rises in his throat and Will grips the back of the bench in front of him. Jack notices, he can hear quick conversation and something is being shoved into his hand and then he's vomiting into a tiny plastic trash can, emptying out all the pain and suffering that had been ripped back open like a healing wound. "Order," the judge barks out, and Will dimly realizes the noise of the courtroom around him, countless conversations and whispers. "Order!"

The silence returns. Will stares at his vomit in the trash can. "Is this true?" the judge asks.

"It-" Hannibal's lawyer knows and can answer for him. They'd decided it was irrelevant to the case and not worth the pain it would bring Will. "It is true, but he shouldn't have known. He hasn't been told. No one has."

"He clearly does."

The prosecution steps up. "I'd like to request we take a recess while we examine this new information."

"I think that would be wise. We'll break for one hour, and when we return we will discuss what to do with the case going forward."

"Thank you, your honor."

Will is dimly aware of activity all around him, Jack trying to say something, people moving in and out of the room. He keeps his head down, refuses to look up, because if he doesn't he's going to have to confront the fact that everyone knows, he didn't even get to make the choice himself and now *everyone knows,* the water is rising, he can see it flooding the room, surging-

"Will." He looks up. The room is empty other than himself, his therapist, and the prosecution. He has no idea when everyone else even left.

His therapist looks angry, but she's trying to ignore it. "Let me take that." Gently, she pulls the trash can out of his hands and passes it to the prosecutor, who sets it down off to the side. "We're going to leave soon, okay?"

That sounds fantastic. He wants to be anywhere but here right now. Preferably somewhere with no people whatsoever, even fucking Hannibal. Shakily, he nods. Tries to speak. "Why-" It comes out hoarse, cracking, and he swallows and stops talking.

"I know I'm probably the last person you want to see right now," the prosecutor says to him, and her voice is so calm and reassuring. Nothing like before.

"You're not Hannibal, so not dead last."

He hadn't even realized his therapist's hand had been on his shoulder until it tightens. "I'll be speaking to him later," she promises, more of a threat. He'd never consciously considered it but it makes sense that they'd know each other, professionally.

"I can't say I blame you right now. But we need you to do one thing first, if you can."

“If you can’t you can say no,” his therapist assures him, and the prosecution nods.

“It doesn’t have to be exact. When… it happened. Could you tell us the time of day? An estimation is fine.”

They’re comparing answers. Hannibal is gone because he’s being asked the same question, and Jack is there to verify. If their answers match then Hannibal is telling the truth and the entire case will probably get thrown out. “Why are you helping?” Will says instead.

She sighs. “If what he’s claiming is true, then legally, he did nothing wrong. I’m not interested in trying to send someone to jail that didn’t break any laws.”

She has her own moral code, one that rigidly aligns with the legal system. Will understands and hates it all the same.

He needs to do this. Be honest, and trust Hannibal, even if the thought of seeing the man right now makes him want to hurl again. “When I woke up, it was late afternoon. It’s hard to remember but when I heard him coming down I looked outside. From the shadows it was probably between noon and one.”

“Thank you.” The prosecutor stands. “Go ahead and get him out of here, if you don’t mind. He doesn’t need to be here any longer.”

In another context, the words may have been cruel. He recognizes the kindness for what it is.

They leave and never look back.

Will doesn’t remember that next few days. He remembers fragments of them; his therapist’s fury, Jack’s tears, and the feeling of the current tugging at his legs.

He finds out later that both his and Hannibal answers had been sealed in separate envelopes and given to the judge to open. They matched. Hannibal knew everything, from when it started to when Will passed out and later woke. The case is suspended indefinitely while extensive testing is run. Will has to sit in the hospital while every part of his biology is poked and prodded and sampled and stolen. Everything, consistently, comes back normal.

Apparently, the same couldn’t be said for Hannibal.

“There’s an unknown element here,” some scientist is telling him. “And it wasn’t here before.”

I don’t fucking care, Will wants to say, but he knows it’s not even true. He’ll never really forgive Hannibal, that much he is certain of. Forgiveness isn’t even a factor in their relationship. Time will pass, the wound will age, and it’ll be just another bump in the road. He understands why Hannibal did it. The claim would have sounded insane and likely been

ignored so he presented it in the most unignorable fashion possible and forced everyone to listen. Wasted all their time on a trial that was all just a setup for the punchline.

Will doesn't feel like laughing. Not now, not ever.

"We can't say for sure this is the cause or even connected to his claimed abilities," the scientist continues. "We can't say what it is, on any level. The fact that there's an unknown like this present is enough to warrant more hands on testing."

Testing of their bond. "Right."

"It will start simple. For a week, we'll be asking you to give the other's whereabouts at a specific time each day."

Will fails this test, spectacularly. Apparently Hannibal aces it. When the scientists return they simply look confused, and a little bit irritated.

Hey, maybe Hannibal *had* been eight hundred meters underwater at noon last Wednesday. Will had about as much confidence in that guess as all of the others.

"This is… unusual," they tell him, like that isn't the most obvious thing in the whole fucking world. "We'll try the maze next."

Despite his doubts, Will had not in fact misheard them and a few days later, he's taken to a large facility near the capital. Apparently it's used in researching the bonds between mates. The presence of what is apparently a large modifiable maze inside makes it seem more like a theme park than a research institute.

This is the first time he sees Hannibal since the trial. Through the glass, from an observation room above the maze. He's asked to plot a course through the maze and then told to guide Hannibal through it. If Hannibal runs into a wall at any point he will be given a mild electric shock.

"I have no idea what I'm supposed to be doing here," he informs the researchers. He hasn't spontaneously developed telepathy.

"You aren't giving him literal word instructions," a woman tells him. "You're meant to sort of urge him in the right direction. Some people find it easier to take it slow, telling them yes or no, walk forwards, and so on."

He looks back down at Hannibal. He's blindfolded and wearing noise canceling headphones. "I'll… try."

They gave him a paper copy of the current setup to draw a path through. Based on the starting location, Hannibal will need to turn left and walk forwards until he gets to the next fork. *Turn,* he tries to urge, and he sees Hannibal incline his head up towards the observation room. He thinks it, more abstract, imagines the world spinning, rotating, and feels absolutely ridiculous doing so.

But then Hannibal, slowly, starts to turn.

Stop, Will thinks, and the world halts, and so does Hannibal. *Good. Forwards.* A car driving along a road, straight. Hannibal steps forwards, runs into a wall, and his entire body jolts as he's shocked.

Will starts laughing. "I know you are angry with me, Will," Hannibal says to him, a mic sending his words up to speakers in their room. "Please just do as the researchers ask."

"Sorry," he tells them. "Couldn't resist."

One of them sighs. "Please refrain from giving him incorrect directions on purpose. It defeats the point of the entire experiment."

Will plays nice. The car imagery seems to work better and though it's slow, he manages to guide Hannibal through the maze with no more errors. Around him, the researchers seem absolutely blown away. "I've never seen anything like this," one of them says to herself.

"What's next?"

Someone else produces another blindfold and set of headphones, and Will's spirit drops as he realizes exactly what's next.

They change the maze before he's dropped into it. No matter what he tries he can't hear or feel *shit* from Hannibal and bumps around randomly before finally ripping off the headphones and throwing them into the ground. "This clearly isn't working! I'm sick of being shocked!"

He peels off the blindfold and when he looks up at the observation room he can see a flurry of activity, researchers speaking and gesturing to each other and in the middle, looking down, he sees Hannibal.

The urge to get up in that observation room with the Alpha is strong, but he can't really pinpoint what exactly he wants to do once he's up there.

That's something he mentions next time he's with his therapist. They spend a lot of time in silence, Will staring at framed paintings of landscapes and flower fields. The first time he had come here they had been forests, rivers. An unfortunate coincidence. They had changed the next time he had seen her and neither of them directly acknowledged it.

"You're angry with him," she points out, drawing attention to the glaringly obvious. "But you still care for him." Despite her gentle nature she has a keen insight and had figured out almost immediately that 'love' wasn't quite the right word to describe Will's emotions. He'd expected her to talk about it, but surprisingly, she never did.

"Of course I'm still angry."

"It's not the anger I want you to talk about."

He sighs. "He saved my life."

"But that doesn't matter to you, does it?"

“I…” Will’s hands tighten on his knees and his gaze drops. It’s hard to walk the line here, to be honest with his own feelings and not let slip too much about Hannibal’s. “No. It hasn’t changed how I feel.”

“And neither has your anger.”

“If my anger could change my feelings for him we never would have gotten together in the first place.”

“Yet this time, it’s different.”

“I can’t… be angry *at* him.” It had taken him far too long to realize that. “I can walk through his thought process, see the path that led to his solution. In his eyes, there was no other option.”

“There were plenty of other options.”

“Not to him. Nothing else had a higher chance of success.” His hands ball into fists. “It’s in his nature. Take the road that leads to victory, consequences be damned. I can’t be angry at being collateral damage.”

“Of course you can,” she says, softly.

“It’s futile. I know what he’s like. I accept it.”

“You can accept him for who he is and still be angry about it.”

“That’s-” He grinds his teeth. “Illogical.”

“We’re not logical, Will.” He finally looks up, into her face. “We’re human.”

Sometimes, he finds himself wishing that wasn’t the case.

“Do you want to talk about your river?” That question means the session is nearing its end. She always asks here, so he has an easy escape, one he always takes.

Even now, he still feels the bone-deep chill of water at his ankles, crushed around them like a shackle. “No,” he tells her. “I don’t.”

She does not press the matter.

Unbelievably, he’s in a forest. “This is insane,” he mutters to himself, perched up in the branches of a tree and hidden from the ground below.

“This will be the last test,” the researcher higher up assures him, and once again Will has to remind himself that no, he is not dreaming. He has been asked to climb a tree for very

scientific reasons and the man in camouflage patterned clothing, holding a clipboard, is in fact a very serious scientist and this is a very serious experiment.

“Forgive me for not jumping for joy.”

The researcher sighs. This is the fifth time they’ve shoved him up a tree and it’s been a different researcher every time, possibly because one test is as long as any of them can tolerate him. “His scent tracking abilities have exceeded our expectations already. If he is able to locate you even now, it would be impressive even if you had been a traditional mated pair, with pheromones.”

“Bloodhounds can track scents much further, so it can’t be *that* impressive.”

“Humans are not dogs,” The researcher tells him, sighing again, and it’s hard to tell if the joke was ignored intentionally or not. “I don’t think you understand how incredible it would be if he is able to find you despite the presence of powerful pheromones masking your scent. It would imply that pheromones actually have very little to do with scents themselves and the way scents are affected by mating bonds. It has the potential to upend everything we believed to be true about the subject.”

“Congratulations,” Will says dryly.

“It will be the only thing my students write about for their theses for the next couple decades,” the researcher grumbles, which is actually pretty funny, and Will makes himself not laugh.

It’s easy when something else distracts him. “Wait, hold on. You said something about masking my scent with pheromones?”

“Yes. They should be here shortly.”

“With a *person?* Do we even have the room up here?”

They shrug. “It will be tight, but we will fit. Save your pity for whoever got stuck up a tree with raw meat.”

Will counts his blessings. It's unclear what alluring scent the raw meat is supposed to provide but hey, he’s not the scientist here.

It’s still light out but not for long, so at the very least he’s going to be stuck up a tree with two total strangers he doesn’t have to look at. He hears footsteps, but the ground is still obscured by branches. The ladder that *thunks* against the trunk is less obscured and both he and the researcher help secure it as an unseen person ascends it, slowly. Arms pop into view and they help the visitor up, a slender, beautiful Omega, a hand curling protectively over their stomach as they awkwardly settle into place on a branch opposite Will, kicking their feet up and leaning back against the trunk. He looks at Will, and Will looks at him, and both of them open their mouths at the same time. The Omega finishes a sentence first.

“Wait-”

“It’s you! Will, right?” It’s said with a smile, one that soon withers. “Oh,” he repeats, much more somber. “That means it’s you.”

“They told you,” Will realizes, and that unexpectedly hurts. He can hear the clatter of the ladder being retracted, distant. The Omega- *Ricky,* his mind supplies- they were barely acquaintances, but that short conversation they shared at the bar had helped Will a lot. It feels awful to have it sullied like this. “Why did they-”

“We did no such thing,” the researcher interjects. “What possible reason would we have had to do so?”

“No, sorry,” the Omega rushes out. “But it’s all over the news and when I learned what I’d be doing it wasn’t… hard to figure out.” He winces. “Sorry if that’s… invasive.”

The only invasive part is learning that it’s apparently all over the news to begin with. Will isn’t surprised, but that doesn’t mean he is happy to hear about it. “It’s fine.”

“I feel like it’s pretty fucking not fine,” Ricky frowns. “But that’s fine, I’ll just sit here and ooze pheromones until your Alpha finds you anyways and then the whole case can waste away into nothing and *then* it’ll be a *little bit* fine.”

Pheromones, again. The strongest would be from an Omega in heat but there are countless ethical reasons they’re not going to shove *that* up a tree in the middle of a forest, so the next most obvious solution would be… Ricky’s hand, curved below his stomach, where Will can see the swell starting to form. “You’re pregnant.”

“Yup! Our second child.” Ricky looks up at the researcher. “Er, is it okay if we talk?”

They nod. “You’ll need to be silent when he’s near, but until then you should be fine.”

“Nice. Anyways, yeah, second child. First just turned a year old last month.” His expression falls a bit. “You probably think I’m a shitty parent, abandoning an infant to go sulk at a bar.”

“Not shitty,” Will responds. “Just scared.”

“Ugh.” Ricky lets his head fall back against the tree. “I’m lucky Jess’s parents put up with me. I’m done running away, though.”

“I’m sure Jess is happy about that.”

“You can’t even imagine,” Ricky laughs. He seems happier, no trace of the fear and insecurity he’d seen vibrating under his skin at the bar to be found.

“What made you stop?”

Ricky looks at him, considering. It’s an odd question, after all. “Well, one day, at a bar I met this gorgeous, depressed looking Beta-” Will groans and Ricky stops, laughing. “I don’t know if I could pinpoint it, honestly. Bit by bit it just… stopped being scary. I stopped wanting to run away on the off chance something went wrong and started wanting to focus on making sure it never did.”

Will could probably learn a thing or two from that. Stop worrying all the time about what could go wrong and put that energy somewhere more constructive instead. The context is vastly different but at its core, the problem is the same. “You must really love her.”

“Of course I do,” Ricky sniffs. “Why else would someone intentionally subject themselves to *two* young children running around and destroying everything?”

It draws a small smile out of Will. “Some people like kids.”

“I like *mine,”* the Omega mutters. “Ours,” he corrects. “We decided to have one each way. That’s why I got wrapped up into this, actually.” He points up at the researcher who is engrossed in something on their tablet, balanced on top of the clipboard. Probably a map of where Hannibal is at the moment. “Female Alpha and Male Omega couples are actually pretty rare, and even then most don’t decide to try and get the Alpha pregnant. Took a long fuckin’ time, lemme tell ya.”

“So you’re also involved in research here.”

“Pretty sweet setup, honestly. We get most of the baby-related items you need to raise a kid paid for. We showed up for a check-up and one of them pulled me aside and went ‘hey, are you free next Saturday?’ And here we are.”

“In a tree,” Will adds.

“Sometimes it’s nice to climb a tree.” Ricky shifts on his branch. “So, hey, the Alpha that’s part of this… is it the one you were talking about? At the bar.”

“He- yeah. It is.”

“So? How did it go?”

“It. Uh.” Will scratches the side of his jaw. “I told him I wanted to be there for his rut pretty much the next day and it just kind of. Snowballed from there.”

Silence hangs in the air, and Will can tell that even the researcher is briefly paying attention to their conversation. “You’re *insane,* ” Ricky finally tells him.

“A bit,” Will admits. Saying it out loud like that really puts the series of events into perspective. Maybe he should apologize to Jack.

“Sounds like it worked out though.”

“I… guess.”

“Or not?” Ricky taps his chin, thinking. “I guess things aren’t gonna be that simple for a long time, are they?”

Possibly not *ever.* “Probably not.”

“Gotta trust the good to outweigh the bad, huh?” He pauses. “Or the mad.”

“I’m not mad at him,” Will lies.

“You should be.” Though the sun has finally set and the world is dark around them, the moon illuminates the area enough that Will can see the scowl on Ricky’s face. “If Jess did something like that to me I’m not sure *what* I’d do.”

He’s talking about the trial. “I’m not mad at him,” he lies again. “He didn’t mean to hurt me like that.”

“Can’t that be *why* you’re mad? What he did hurt you, severely, and it wasn’t even the reason why he did it. It was just a… side effect.”

And just like that, everything settles into place. Almost certainly not the way Ricky had intended, but it stands out all the same. “I… never thought of it like that.”

“Sorry if I seem intense about this. I can’t even begin to understand most of what you went through but I do understand a part of it.” The moon peeks through the leaves and he sees a deep, raw pain in Ricky’s eyes, old and unhealed, buried. It’s gone just as quickly as it came. “You can talk to me about it, you know. If you ever feel like you want to.”

“I…” He certainly doesn’t mean now, in the tree, with an audience. “Maybe someday.”

“You know how to find me.”

Will pauses. “I… do?”

Ricky elbows the researcher above them. “Hm? Ah, yes, I’ll pass along your email address when we’re done here.”

“No pressure,” Ricky tells him.

The consideration is welcome. “Thank you,” Will says, honest for once. “I mean it.”

“Hush,” the scientist tells them, and they both look up to him. “He’s approaching.”

They all fall silent, waiting with baited breath as the rumble of a car can be heard off in the distance, followed by an engine turning off and the opening and closing of a car door. Footsteps approach, flashlights lighting up the forest beneath them, until plain as day, Hannibal is standing at the base of the tree and looking up.

“Incredible,” the researcher gasps. “He came straight here from the start.”

“Did you marry a German Shepherd?” Ricky teases

“We’re not married,” Will corrects, and then all of a sudden he looks down to see Hannibal *climbing up the tree* while another researcher frantically tries to stop him from the ground. As always, all efforts to dissuade Hannibal are fruitless.

He pops up into the part of the tree everyone is sitting in, still managing to startle Will despite him watching the entire process occur. Hannibal’s nose wrinkles and he turns to Ricky,

briefly. “Congratulations.” With that he grabs Will by the collar and throws him over his shoulder before nimbly climbing back down the tree.

“It was nice seeing you!” Ricky shouts down, clearly amused, waving as Hannibal carries Will away like a sack of potatoes, towards the car he arrived in.

“Let me down.”

“You stink of him,” Hannibal growls, very obviously displeased.

“We’re about to stink of dirt after I knock you on your ass if you don’t put me down.”

Hannibal puts him down. “He was not a stranger to you.”

With a sigh, Will adjusts his clothes. Knowing the source of his anger feels freeing, like he can finally talk to Hannibal normally again. “Before you get all prissy about that you should know that I have met him exactly once before this and he’s about thirty percent of the reason I ever ended up fucking you in the first place.”

“He seemed nice,” Hannibal says next, such an abrupt pivot from before that Will actually laughs. For the first time in a long time, Will sees Hannibal smile.

The researcher urges them into the car before anything else can happen.

Will finds out the results of everything when one day, Hannibal comes to the hospital and picks him up and he’s simply discharged into his custody without any fuss.

It also makes him realize a part of this he hadn’t thought of, and his stomach sinks at the thought.

“The case was dismissed,” Hannibal tells him, as they drive somewhere that is clearly not going to be Wolf Trap. “Our circumstances are rare. They have decided that we are closer to a true mated pair than unlike one, and therefore are to be legally considered as such.”

“So you killing him was legal. Good for you. Where are we going?” They way he was almost signed over like property is rankling him, and Will’s fingers tap restlessly on the seatbelt.

“Dale City.” The rut house. “Your dogs are there,” Hannibal adds.

“They better fucking be.”

“Are you unhappy with this result?”

“No,” Will replies, instant. “Of course not. I don’t know how I feel about the… implications of it.”

“You don’t want to be treated differently.”

“I don’t want to be treated like *anything* .”

“What would you like for dinner?”

“Hannibal, *stop,* ” Will says, sharply. “We can’t just pretend that nothing happened. That nothing’s changed.”

“I don’t plan to.”

“Then what *are* you planning?”

“Right now, I am simply trying to plan dinner.”

Will closes his eyes and takes a deep, steadying breath. Don’t fight. Not here, not now. “I want the unhealthiest thing you’re allowed to make me.”

“Very well,” Hannibal murmurs, and the rest of the drive is done in a suffocating silence.

Will doesn’t even make it in the house. When Hannibal opens the front door his dogs explode out of it and swarm him, and outside they stay until the chill becomes too much to bear and Hannibal drags them all inside. Dinner is rich, decadent, probably far outside his meal plan but Will truly does not give a fuck. He’s been steadily putting on weight and while it has yet to translate back into muscle, he at least no longer looks like he’s been starved. Bit by bit, things are stitching back together.

“Where would you like to live?” Hannibal asks him, over dessert, like it's just more casual conversation.

Will nearly drops his fork. “Excuse me?”

“I am asking where you would like to live.”

“I have a home,” Will points out.

“Yes, Wolf Trap is an option. I am simply pointing out that there are several options to be had.”

Will sets his fork down as realization sets in. The click of metal on the plate sounds deafening. “You mean with you.”

“Of course. Mated pairs live together.”

Anxiety winds up his spine, tangles in his lungs. “Not always.”

“That is true. Our circumstances are unique, and as my freedom hinges on that very thing, it would be wise not to test it.”

He can hear the iron bars clanging shut around him, stealing away his freedom yet again. “You motherfucker,” he hisses. “Was this your plan this whole time? Was everything for this?”

“No,” Hannibal bites out, and the look in his eyes is so icy it makes Will shiver. “No plan of mine would ever deliver you into the hands of another.”

In his gut, he knows Hannibal is right. Elaborate machinations will never win out over pure, simple jealousy. Possessiveness. “So you’re just taking advantage of the circumstance.”

“I fail to see why I should not do so.”

It’s making Will furious, mostly because Hannibal is *right.* There’s no way out of this one. He’s trapped, pure and simple. “How’d you cheat through the tests? I couldn’t figure out why you’d go to such lengths at first. It sure makes sense now.”

“I altered nothing.”

For a moment, Will hears nothing, like his ears are stuffed with cotton. “What?”

“Some things are beyond even me.”

“But you.” His brain is slowing to a crawl. “That’s not possible.”

“It is, Will.” Hannibal calmly eats his dessert. “What we share is a true mating bond.”

“Then why can’t I feel anything?”

“Because you are a Beta. Only I, as an Alpha, can take advantage of it.”

It takes a moment for the implications of that to truly sink in. When it does, Will finally smiles, a sick sense of glee washing over him. “Options, you said?” He says it gently, calming himself, soothing.

“Indeed.” Hannibal stands, places his silverware on the now empty plate. “Wolf Trap, Dale City, and my home in Baltimore. It need not be permanent, if you wish to find a place that suits both of us.” The tension seems to be leaving Hannibal as well, some of that ever-present guard slipping away.

Will’s not sure he *ever* wants to go back to Wolf Trap, and for a moment his calmness slips. It’s contaminated, unsafe, freezing rivers and grasping hands. At the same time, he wants very little less than to move into Hannibal’s perfectly curated space in Baltimore. They need somewhere that is equally both of them. “Here, for now. We should find a new place. Maybe something near the ocean.” Near a dog beach. That’s something he can talk Hannibal into later. "No cameras," he quietly adds, and Hannibal freezes in place, a flash of absolute blind fury in his eyes-

He didn't know. How could he have known? Will hasn't even told his therapist about that particular violation, and it hadn't come up in the investigation or trial so clearly James had gotten rid of the files. At least he's dead. Small victories.

It takes a while, Hannibal standing there with his eyes closed, calming himself down, just as Will is doing. "No cameras," he agrees. "Never again." The promise rings with finality.

Their torpor ends. “I figured that would be your answer.” Hannibal walks towards Will, stacks their plates together, and smiles so gently Will searches desperately for the lie. But there is none.

It’s odd to see Hannibal this calm and find it isn’t manufactured. Though the man always exudes a sense of self-assurance, of control, it’s always with an undercurrent of alertness. The ability to react on a moment’s notice. Will thinks about the possibility of living together, the domesticity, the normalcy, and he sees Hannibal’s shoulders slacken, sees that alertness fade under the weight of contentment. Of trust. Of safety. Will feels relaxed, and so does Hannibal.

Will’s hand shoots out and grabs Hannibal by the tie, yanking his head down level with where Will is seated. Hannibal lets himself be manhandled, watching with glittering eyes. He’s not angry at the deception. He’s excited by it.

“Never hurt me like that again unless I ask you to,” he whispers, voice low and threatening. “Understood?” He jerks the tie again, just to make Hannibal tense up. Reflexively, Hannibal growls, and Will places a hand behind his neck and slams his head onto the table, onto the dishes and cutlery. A fork cuts into his cheek. “Do you understand me, Hannibal?”

“As you wish,” the Alpha murmurs, and only then does Will release him. He stands up, an incoherent mixture of fury, desire, and pride in his eyes, blood and chocolate smeared across his face.

It’s as ugly as it is beautiful.

Intimacy is difficult.

No, Will corrects himself. *It’s impossible.*

Living with Hannibal is fine. Sure, he’s unhappy about being forced into it, but the actual act of living together with the other man is perfectly fine. Hannibal corners Will into a healthier lifestyle, making sure he eats three meals a day and goes to sleep at a reasonable hour. They fall into cohabitation like they’ve been married for decades. All of that is fine.

What’s not fine is the way that every time Hannibal tries to touch Will, he flinches.

It almost makes Hannibal look angry. Not at Will, never at Will, but at a long dead phantom that inflicted this on him. It irritates Will because he doesn’t want to make Hannibal mad, at least not like this, and he thought they would be fine. Hannibal had touched him at their reunion without issue, so why here? Why now? He misses the closeness, the warm touches

and gestures. None of that stops him from faintly trembling when a hand lands heavy on his waist, or from jerking away when Hannibal leans in to scent him.

Hannibal is patient. He shouldn't have to be.

"Just do it anyways," Will finally tells him, after pivoting away from Hannibal's outstretched hand. "It's the only way I'll get used to it again."

"Desensitization is not a proper solution."

"I don't want to wait for a proper solution," Will bites out. From the living room, he hears one of his dogs whine.

"We cannot be reckless here, Will."

It feels like he's living in a house with a photo of Hannibal. Everything looks the same but the connection is smothered, underwater. "I don't want you to be gentle."

"I don't want to hurt you." It's laughable, so blatantly false that it makes Will want to peel away Hannibal's skin just to get at what's underneath.

"I want you to."

Hannibal looks at him. There's no hesitation, no second guessing, not a sliver of doubt. "Very well. Give me a week."

Will doesn't want to wait a week. He wants Hannibal's hand around his throat, clamping down, squeezing the life out of him. He wants a knife at his throat. He wants his flesh split open, torn between sharp teeth, blood running down his arms. He wants what only Hannibal can give him. "Fine. A week."

He lets Hannibal handle everything. Will plays with his dogs, takes them for walks, has conversations with Hannibal that feel frustratingly pedestrian. It's almost like the Alpha is going out of his way to be as normal as possible, and he can't tell if he's doing it intentionally to irritate Will or for some other, nebulous reason.

Hannibal leaves for hours at a time every couple of days and Will spends that time in anticipation of what may be to come.

Roughly a week later, in the evening, they board Will's dogs for the night. When they drive back it's not to Dale City, but to Baltimore.

This house has always been imposing. It's every bit the personality Hannibal wears like an accessory, strange paintings and sculptures surrounded by dark wood and a cold, unfriendly interior. The only place that had ever felt like it fit was the kitchen, gleaming, polished appliances and countertops, rows of sharp knives on the walls. This is where he's led. It's astonishing the lack of fear he feels when they enter the pantry considering their history with pantries. Instead, he's focused on how Hannibal crouches down, touches something on the floor, and with a click a trapdoor opens from the wood, revealing a set of stairs into darkness.

Wary, Will descends the steps behind Hannibal. He trusts Hannibal, on most levels, but some part of his brain, automatic and primal, sends goosebumps raising across his skin. Fear crackles at the edge of his mind. This is different, and the same. It's a trapdoor, not a regular door. Instead of being open and exposed to the basement the staircase is bordered by walls, claustrophobic. It's not a regular basement, it's a-

The lights click on and for a moment, Will forgets how to breathe. He already knew, he was already aware, so this shouldn't bother him, right? The stone walls, the smooth floor, the sterile environment with a metal mortuary table in the center. It's huge, spanning what's likely the entire length of the house, and there are tray tables with operating implements scattered around the room, large cabinets and empty spaces on the floor where things have obviously been recently removed. There are anchors for chains and ropes on the ceiling, grates on the floor for easy draining, taps around the room for quick access to water, to ease the process of washing away blood and grime. This is the kind of room that would raise suspicion even in the house of an avid hunter.

Hannibal is not a hunter. Not of most animals, anyways.

The hooks on the ceiling are spaced far enough apart that they could be used to hang large cuts of meat. Some of the empty spots can easily be filled with refrigerators and freezers and there are outlets near them, a door is opening in his mind and realization is creeping through-

He slams the door shut. This is not a realization he can afford to have, not right now.

"Is everything alright, Will?" Hannibal asks him, and it hits him that he hasn't even left the bottom of the stairs yet.

"Sorry. Basements." He forces himself to step down and forwards, slowly looking around the room much more obviously. "This is a very… specific setup."

"Somewhere easy to clean is important for what we will be doing."

Hannibal's not… actually going to kill him, is he? Will immediately dismisses the thought as ridiculous. Even as he watches Hannibal extract several lengths of a blood-red rope, the fear starts to ebb. He knows Hannibal is a monster, but it's a monster he can trust.

Hannibal places the ropes to Will's throat, comparing the color. "These will do nicely. Please undress. You can leave your clothes on the table."

There should be something that bothers him about undressing and neatly folding his clothes to set them down on a surface that Hannibal has unquestionably dissected human beings on. "Everything?"

"Everything you do not wish to be destroyed."

They can do that later. Will strips naked and leaves his clothes on the table, running a hand through his hair nervously. It's much harder with it shorter; it's not really long enough to get a solid grip on anymore. The basement is cold and he shivers. Maybe that's intentional, too.

“Will you be okay with me tying you up?”

Will looks at the rope. It looks soft, slender, miles away from biting metal cuffs with a pitiful attempt at padding. “I… think so. Can you avoid my ankles?”

A nod. “I shall.” Then, he pauses, looks at Will, down his arms, then back up at the ceiling. “Though a modification is in order, I believe.”

There’s no way he hadn’t planned for this eventuality and sure enough, from the same cabinet Hannibal got the rope, he’s removing a pair of what look like very oddly designed gloves, dark leather and red straps and red fur lining the inside. “Give me your hands.”

Will does, and Hannibal slides the cuffs on, tightening them in place. They’re soft, wrapping mostly around Will’s wrists and extending upwards over his palm, ending in large metal rings. Suspension cuffs. He can easily wrap his hands around the fur and leather on his palms to bear most of the weight. “Just these?” Will asks, even though he can see Hannibal unwinding the rope as well.

“No. Keep your wrists together and hold your arms out.” The color of the rope matches the red on the cuffs perfectly, and Will watches Hannibal wind it around his forearms in a ladder pattern, tying them together but leaving his upper arms apart. “Above your head.” As Will lifts his arms Hannibal steps back to the wall, to a pulley system, lowering a hook large enough to hang a rack for curing m-

For hanging something. Wordlessly, Hannibal loops the metal rings on the cuffs to the hook then cranks the hook back up, lifting Will off the ground, hanging him in the air. He grips the cuffs and pushes his head through his arms until they’re behind him, an uncomfortable strain but a manageable one. “Tell me if you start to lose feeling in your arms.”

Will tries to nod and finds he doesn’t quite have the room. It doesn’t feel like the ropes are tight enough to cut off circulation, or pinched against any nerves. “I will.”

Metal scrapes on stone as Hannibal drags out what can only be described as a giant pail, wide enough to catch anything falling off the man and deep enough that it can hold a great deal of liquid. *It’s for blood,* Will realizes, a shiver running through him. Why would Hannibal want to save his blood? Why wouldn’t he? Is it sterile? Meals fly through his mind, soups and stews and sausages and puddings, has he eaten any, has Hannibal fed him-

“Remember, Will,” Hannibal tells him. He hadn’t even realized he was starting to panic. “You can end this at any time with one word.”

“Um. Yeah.” Will swallows thickly. “Sorry. Not used to this.”

“I imagine not.” There’s a clattering as a tray table is rolled over and he watches as Hannibal, back to him, pulls on a pair of surgical gloves. Only now does it really hit him that Hannibal is dressed in light clothing, a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up and khaki colored pants, none of his usual suits to be found. He steps aside and turns, revealing a tray of scalpels and needles and gauze, and Will’s heart stutters in his chest. “The word, Will.”

It takes Will a moment to realize what Hannibal is asking for. “Alabama,” he whispers, and it sounds ridiculous. Maybe he should have put more thought into it the first time.

“Very good. Let us begin.”

As Hannibal approaches with a scalpel in hand, Will is struck with the urge to back away, prey fleeing from a predator. He can’t do much suspended as he is. Normally Hannibal is an inch or so taller but like this, he has to look up into Will’s face as he raises the scalpel, placing the tip just between his collarbones. “There is a great deal more I would like to do with the rope,” Hannibal admits, digging the point of the blade in shallowly, and Will flinches. “I could tie you up thoroughly enough to hang you with that alone.”

“Sorry,” Will mutters, and Hannibal just frowns.

“Do not apologize. We have our whole lives ahead of us. Besides,” Hannibal says, digging the blade deeper, and blood wells up from the wound and starts to drip down Will’s chest. “There are other ways of dressing your body in red.”

The scalpel cuts downwards diagonally, slicing until it reaches the top of Will’s chest, at which point it turns sharply and cuts closer to horizontal, leaving a red line in its wake. It stings, makes Will hiss at the pain, deep enough to make blood bloom like rubies, held frozen in place. When Hannibal mirrors the cut on the other side of Will’s chest it's just as shallow. More than anything, it simply stings. It burns as Hannibal finishes the bottom half of the diamond and more diamonds beneath it, lines stretching out from the points, covering the span of Will’s torso. “I guess I don’t need to ask how you’re planning on tying me up later,” he laughs, breathless, his body warming beneath the bite of the blade.

“You do not.” The scalpel returns to the first point and without warning it traces the first line again, deeper, sharper, and Will can’t help but cry out at the pain. Blood flows from the wound, weeping streaks across his body. “Surely you did not think it would be over with that.”

“No, but.” Will’s jaw clenches and he closes his eyes as another line is deepened. It hurts in a way he’s missed, blood running hot down his body. “Didn’t think you were just doing the template either.” His hands tighten around the cuffs, anchoring him, diverting his focus as Hannibal parts his flesh. He wields the scalpel like an extension of his own body, cuts steady and sure, penetrating into Will, painting red patterns as it dances. Sharp angles, ropes from his own flesh and blood, binding him without an inch of fiber. They capture him just as well.

The cuts are careful further down, over his stomach, pushing in further as they skirt around the edges of his body, away from organs and arteries. It feels like the scalpel leaves fire in its wake as it travels, every cut lighting up all of Will’s nerves, sending sparks behind his eyes. Only when Hannibal steps back does he open his eyes once more.

The scalpel drips with blood and it stains the blue surgical gloves as well. He can hear the *plink* of his blood falling into the pail below him and he can’t help but drop his head down, seeing his torso lined with trails of blood, winding down his legs and feet. They mostly originate from the corners of the pattern, where the scalpel turned and changed direction, running down his body like stars shooting past the night sky.

His heart is beating faster. His throat feels dry. It's more effort than it should have been to look back up and he sees Hannibal, staring at his blood-streaked chest, eyes are clouded as Will's mind feels. "You enjoy this," Hannibal states, stepping towards Will. The back of the blade, squared and dull, presses up against his cock, hard and curving up into the blood. "You're in this state from this alone. Exquisite."

The cold metal against him makes Will twitch and shiver, gasping at the contact. All Hannibal has to do is flick the blade upwards, invert it, and the threat both makes Will cringe and curl his toes. It's not a typical sort of pleasure, embers sparking all across his body, his body tensing up in anticipation of a mutilation that may never come. Surely Hannibal wouldn't do something *that* reckless, would he? It doesn't stop his pulse from racing, the flush dusting across his cheeks and under half-lidded eyes, and if he closes his eyes he can almost imagine-

The Alpha blinks and steps back quickly, like he narrowly avoided doing something he would have regretted. He drops the scalpel on the tray and takes off his gloves, puts on a new pair, then picks up a clean scalpel and returns. "How does it feel?" he asks, like he doesn't know.

"Almost painless," Will tells him, and his voice sounds strained, faded. "The cuts don't hurt anymore." The scalpel licks across his chest, the bare skin there, deep, blood flowing freely. Will groans. "It feels-"

"-scorching," Hannibal finishes, as he cuts into the other side of Will's chest. "Ablaze."

"Like my fears are draining away. Everything."

"You will look beautiful scarred." The scalpel raises, presses a kiss to his cheek with the flat of the blade. "Even more so here."

"We can't." There is no possible way they would be able to explain that, not to anyone.

"I know." Hannibal removes the blade, fury in his gaze. "A fantasy and nothing more."

"I'd let you," Will whispers, before he can think better of it, and then he cries out as the blade cuts into his arm, lines radiating out from his shoulder. It can't be easy to draw blood along his skin with the position he's in but despite that, there is no second pass this time. The scalpel slides deep from the start, lines fanning outwards. Each touch excises another useless thought from his mind, another worry cast away, replaced with simply *feeling*.

"You cannot tempt me like this, Will." Hannibal is behind him now, scalpel sinking into his back, and the contact makes him arch, the cuts on his front pulling and dripping more blood with his movement. He feels lines carved into him, stretching out along his shoulder like wings, wax melting down his back as he approaches the sun. His skin feels cold, hands clammy and sweating, his grip on the cuffs harder and harder to maintain. Steel kisses down his spine, shallow, dipping deeper as it fragments outwards, smooths arcs and swirling patterns in his skin. That heat envelops his back and curls around, up and over his other arm, a slick sensation dripping down his body, and when Hannibal steps back around to his front he has to blink several times to focus his gaze on the man.

It's like looking at him through a hazy curtain. He can't tell if that same look is in the other's eyes or if it's just suffusing out into the entire world around them. "Will," Hannibal calls out, a hand on his chin tilting his head up. "Can you hear me?"

Yes, Will answers, or thinks he does, only realizing he hadn't when Hannibal repeats the question. "Yes," he manages to say. He can't hear blood impacting against metal anymore, just the steady *drip drip drip* of water into a puddle. It has more weight to it.

"Where are we right now?"

"Baltimore?" He thought they were in Baltimore. Had they moved at some point? The world seems nebulous, malleable, something he can change at any moment. Ethereal. Wonderful.

"Good." Hannibal stands up on his toes and kisses Will on the forehead, hand leaving blood smeared across his cheek and beard before retreating. "You're doing so well, Will."

"I feel strange," Will tells him. Up close, he can see the faded look in Hannibal's eyes was not imagined.

"A pleasant strange," Hannibal answers, not a question. There's no need for it to be a question when they both feel the same thing. "We are almost done. Relax, Will."

Will doesn't think he could move a single muscle in his body if he tried. Distantly, he can tell that his hands are still locked around the cuffs, but even that ironclad grip will eventually fail. He can barely feel the ropes around his forearms anymore. His head hangs down, eyes looking down his chest, blood running down his chest and past his soft cock, spiraling around his legs. Hannibal has fresh gloves, a fresh scalpel, and then he's leaning down, back to the tortoiseshell pattern, continuing it downwards, across hips and down his thighs. With every new caress Will feels himself splinter, drain away, all his worries falling into the pail of blood. He's freezing, the blood so hot it's almost burning, cycling back around to pain, underwater. "It's cold," he murmurs, eyes closing, despite the fire razing him to nothing. The polarity of the sensations envelops him like a blanket, smothering, crushing away his consciousness, draining the life out of his body. He's dying, he's being killed, his life leeching into the pail below him, and it's the best thing he's ever felt in the world.

Dimly, he feels the pressure of something on his other leg, then a clang of metal falling into metal. He thinks his leg may be being moved. Far away, he hears his name being called, insistent, and he reluctantly opens his eyes.

Hannibal kneels below him, a wild look in his eyes, Will's leg in his hands. "Look at me," the Alpha growls, then teeth fit around his ankle, parting flesh like butter. A soft whimper escapes his lips. There's so much blood, on his body, out of his body, in the pail, in the world, on Hannibal, on his clothes, his other leg is moving, teeth catch on flesh, every thought and sensation in his brain combining and erupting-

With a sigh, Will closes his eyes and lets it end.

When Will wakes, he can't move.

Panic hurries what should have been a slow awakening. He can't move, he's trapped, his limbs aren't responding and his eyes aren't opening and-

He sinks deeper.

There are no dreams here. One moment he's falling, deeper through the waves, into darkness, then he's surfacing with a gasp, the cold air harsh on his face.

Everything hurts.

"Careful," someone tells him, and pain lances through his head. When he tries to press his hands against his temples those hurt too, his arms hurt, his chest hurts, every single inch of his body hurts. "Do not reopen your wounds."

"Then help me," he hisses, eyes still screwed shut. A hand on his back carefully helps him up, against soft pillows, and finally, he opens his eyes.

It's bright. He's in a bed, not the hospital, so large and opulent it must be Hannibal's. The sheets are a cream color, mottled with an abstract red pattern-

It's blood.

"I did not want to risk moving you to change the sheets."

Will closes his eyes and counts to ten. "Try again."

"It was aesthetically pleasing."

He opens his eyes once more and turns to face the monster. "You sedated me."

"Through the worst of it." Hannibal certainly looks put together *now* . "Most should heal with minimal scarring."

"I thought you wanted me scarred."

"What I want does not necessarily align with reality."

Will tips his head back against the headboard. He's not… upset. He had asked Hannibal to hurt him and had a great many opportunities to back out of this. Still, he finds himself almost… amazed at the grandeur of it all. The savagery. "How much blood did I lose?"

"You gave me a great deal." Hannibal, behind the mask, looks pleased. "A prompt transfusion assured no lasting damage had occurred."

"A transfusion?" Will frowns. "Do you just have extra blood laying around?"

Even as he asks, the answer reaches him. Not quickly enough to stop Hannibal from saying it himself. “I have told you before, Will. We share the same blood type.”

He looks down at his arms. The forearms are bare, untouched because of the rope that had wound around them. They look the same. He can’t see Hannibal’s blood running through his veins, if it even is anymore. Maybe by now his heart has cycled it all out, changed it to his own. “Did you need a week to get enough of your own blood drawn in preparation?”

“Among other things.” A hand drapes across his forehead and Will closes his eyes. He doesn’t flinch this time. “No fever.”

“Did I have one?”

“You did not.” Hannibal is telling the truth, best as Will can tell. “The worst of your wounds may take some time to heal.”

He can trace the pain, notice how it gets more severe the further down his body he gets. His ankles hurt the most. If he had been given painkillers at any point he certainly doesn’t have them now. “Got a little excited, did we?”

“As did you,” Hannibal sniffs. Trying to pin the blame on him.

He's not really *wrong.*

Hannibal continues. “None of your wounds require stitches as long as you behave.”

“Subtle.”

“I’ve found it’s far too dangerous to offer you subtlety.”

Will laughs, and it makes him wince. “Fair. Come here.”

The other man leans further in, drawn like a moth to flame. He falls still when Will grabs his wrists, places Hannibal’s hand over his heart. “Touch me,” he asks, with a cruel smile.

Hannibal wouldn’t risk reopening the wounds and his lips curl into a snarl, not appreciating the weaponized invitation. He moves his hands, cupping Will’s jaw, and yet again, Will does not flinch. He doesn’t flinch as Hannibal smooths his hands down his arms, runs them down his torso, slips them under his shirt and over bandages. Instead of his skin crawling at the slightest touch he feels blood running down his body, blooming beneath Hannibal’s fingertips. They descend, down his hips, onto his thighs-

And Will’s hands grab Hannibal’s wrists, ripping his hands away, eyes wide. “S-Sorry,” he stumbles over, surprised by his own actions.

“Progress all the same,” Hannibal murmurs, taking back his hands. “You are healing.”

“I don’t feel like it,” Will says quietly, and soon large hands curl around his neck. Hannibal doesn’t squeeze, just lets them sit there, and it’s soothing, comforting.

“This was supposed to be an alternative,” Hannibal muses, and Will almost laughs again.

“Congratulations on finding an alternative several magnitudes less viable than the original concept.”

Just barely, the hands start to squeeze, and Will smiles.

Hannibal spends a great deal of time in the bedroom Will is more or less stuck in as he’s healing, possibly because he knows if Will gets bored he’ll stand up and leave, which is almost guaranteed to reopen many of his injuries. Since the savage bites on his ankles are the deepest, Will can’t walk without assistance for several weeks, Hannibal carrying him through the house like an oversized pet in the interim. It’s driving him a little bit insane, mostly because of how god damn pleased with himself Hannibal looks to be ferrying him around. His dogs had been brought over at some point and most are allowed inside the room though Buster in particular is swiftly banned. It’s simple, almost domestic, and Will had always thought he’d absolutely hate that sort of peaceful normalcy.

He’s surprised to discover that he doesn’t.

As soon as they are able, they return to their home in Dale City. Life goes on. Hannibal keeps seeing patients and Will lounges around the house, playing with the dogs and leafing through Hannibal’s belongings to try and find something to do. It doesn’t bore him, not really. It’s empty in a way that doesn’t bother him. After so much unwelcome excitement in his life, he finds that he has a newfound appreciation for boring.

Maybe he’d always been okay with it because he knew, deep down, it had a time limit. He wakes up one day to a voicemail from Jack.

They end up meeting at the park again. Will doesn’t really want to go anywhere near Quantico for the time being, and it seems that Jack feels much the same way.

“How are you doing?” is the first thing Jack asks him, and Will wants to decompose back into the dirt.

Instead, he looks out at his dogs, running to and fro in the park. “I don’t know,” he answers, honestly.

Jack makes a vague grunt of agreement. “We should talk about work,” he sighs. Never one to waste time on small talk.

It’s appreciated, now. Like ripping off the world’s largest and most painful bandaid. “I don’t think I want to come back to the BAU.”

“Then thank god for that, since I wasn’t planning on asking you to.”

Will turns to Jack in surprise. “That’s not what you wanted to talk about?”

Jack sighs, hands in his pockets. He’s wearing a long coat to keep the chill away. The sky is overcast, cloudy, and it's supposed to snow soon. “Will, after everything that happened, I don’t really want you anywhere near field work. You’ve been through more than enough shit

to last the rest of your life without making you look into the brains of the worst sort of people in the world for a living."

It's bittersweet. He'd always sort of known that Jack was aware of the toll case work took on Will, and there were plenty of moments when Jack had protected him from things, shielded him from the worst of it. But there were just as many, if not more, moments where he'd been shoved right into the fires, pushed harder than he could handle just to catch another killer. Hearing it admitted to so openly simultaneously enrages him and fills him with a strange sense of relief. "So then what's there to talk about?"

"I don't want to kick you out into the cold. There are other things you can do for the FBI. I know that you teach classes sometimes. You could do that full time."

It's not the worst job he can think of. "I don't know."

"You don't have to make a decision now. You don't even have to make a decision soon." Jack shifts on the bench. "If you want to leave and never look back, I wouldn't blame you. I might even give you the first push myself. But I know you, Will. I know you want to help people, and that's a way you can keep doing it without being directly involved."

Jack is right. Will can feel the idea latching onto his brain, putting down roots. He knows, eventually, he'll say yes.

But he needs more time. "Maybe. I'll have to think about it."

Jack seems to deflate and finally, he turns and looks at Will. "I'm here for you, Will. We all are. Just make sure you remember that."

I have Hannibal, Will manages not to say. Instead, slowly, he nods. "How is the rest of the team doing?"

A much more irritated sigh. "Okay. Beverly keeps complaining about how quiet it is now. Price punched a hole in the wall."

" *Price?"*

"I didn't believe it either when they told me." Jack settles back on the bench, facing forwards again. "We'll be fine."

"Are you still going to ask Hannibal for help?" There's no real reason why they shouldn't, other than optics, which he knows Jack doesn't give a shit about.

Except suddenly Jack goes still and the air grows tense. Will feels himself go cold, colder than the air around them. What does Jack know? How *could* he know? "I don't want to see Dr Lecter anywhere near any sort of criminal investigation for the rest of his life."

His mouth goes dry. Futilely, he tries to swallow, get some moisture. "Why not?"

"You weren't there to see his behavior once you had gone missing. I saw a side of him that I've seen in others, in the kind of people we hunt down and arrest." He looks back to Will, his

gaze piercing, and Will feels pinned in place. “And I know you well enough to know that you are fully aware of that part of him as well.”

“Jack, I-”

“Don’t say anything.” Will’s mouth slams shut. “He *intimidated a witness* so we could get an arrest warrant. And you know what? I didn’t stop him, because I wanted to find you too. We all knew who was behind it. But we can’t do our jobs based on what we *think* we know.”

“He never would have fabricated evidence in any other circumstance,” Will says hurriedly.

“Trust me, I know now. I had to spend hours and hours pouring over every other case he’s touched to make sure everything was still above board.”

Will looks down, at the bench between his knees. He hears a dog trotting up to him- Winston, and soon the furry head is placed on his lap. “Does anyone else know?”

“No one.” Jack pulls his hands out of the jacket, pulling on his gloves. “I need to believe- I *have* to believe that the only reason he did it was because you were involved. That’s a risk I can’t afford to take going forward.”

“You still trust me.”

Jack stands. “I do, because you have the moral compass Lecter lacks.”

This is a warning. Jack might not trust Hannibal any longer, but he trusts Will enough to come to him if anything truly terrible happens. He’s walking through the forest, led astray by a broken compass. It makes Will want to puke. He should warn Hannibal, except he *can't,* because that puts Jack in danger. “I’m not spying on him for you.”

“And I’m not asking you to.” Jack turns towards Will. “He’d do anything for you, Will. I need to know that you can make sure that he *won’t.* Can I trust you to do that?”

How many cases had Hannibal influenced? Will knows he’s a murderer, probably a serial killer. Had they worked on any of his own crimes? Had all of this started as a way to cover his own tracks before careening off the rails? He’s not just killing them either, he’s fucking eating them, because that door got blown off its hinges some time in those days where he sat in a bed at Baltimore and realized that when Hannibal opens his mouth he can see blood on his teeth. Hell, he’s probably fucking feeding it to all of them. A predator, a good old fashioned monster, the boogeyman parents warn their children about to scare them to sleep at night. He doesn’t see it as cannibalism because they're *beneath* him. Hannibal, fundamentally, is uncontrollable.

Will’s not even sure he’d ever want to try. The monster is what trapped him. He looks up to Jack, petting Winston’s head, and wonders just when it was that Hannibal managed to crush Will's compass beneath his heel without him even noticing.

Snow starts to fall from the sky and Will holds out his hand, catching a snowflake and watching it melt into nothing. “Yes,” he lies, “You can.”

Chapter End Notes

Just a couple notes. This 'series' is over at this point, and I have no ideas or plans to continue it. I do however have a lot of specific ideas regarding the fundamental changes to omegaverse biology that play out as a result, and I'll mention the most important one; extensive testing will reveal that the bond Will and Hannibal have is not unique, it's simply unusually strong. All Alpha/Beta and Omega/Beta mates have a similar bond that is, most of the time, so weak as to be unnoticeable. It's likely that people have brought up this possibility before and were largely ignored. It would lead to a lot of legal changes regarding the rights of mated pairs.

Bringing back Ricky was, comparatively to the tests themselves, a last minute change. I pretty much went from making the forest test to having to come up with the strongest scent possible to thinking about the whole pheromone thing that hasn't been a factor up until this point, and things went from there. Eventually, Will will contact him. It probably wouldn't be any time soon.

Thank you for reading the monstrosity this became!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!